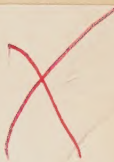


**THE HOUSE
IN
QUEEN ANNE
SQUARE**

W. D. Lyell

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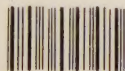
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The
House in Queen Anne Square



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The House in Queen Anne Square

A Tale

BY

W. D. LYELL

"What is nearest to us, touches us most. The passions
rise higher at domestic than at imperial tragedies."

—SAMUEL JOHNSON.

"Fareweel, Edinburgh ! . . .

. . . Lang gowns and big wigs a' !

And, if ye dinna keep the peace, 'tis no' for want o' Law !"

—LADY NAIRNE.

William Blackwood and Sons
Edinburgh and London

1920

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CONTENTS.

PROLOGUE.

	PAGE
THE ACCIDENT AT ELSPETH JUNCTION . . .	1

BOOK I.

THE PERTINACITY OF PENNIFEATHER.

THE NARRATIVE OF ROBERT MONTGOMERY.

CHAP.		
I.	THE INCEPTION OF THE OPERA . . .	7
II.	THE OPENING CHORUS AND THE CLOSING FLOWERS .	18
III.	MR PENNIFEATHER GROWS CURIOUS . . .	27
IV.	HARRY DIRECTS A REHEARSAL: AND PENNIFEATHER PROCEEDS TO INVESTIGATE . . .	36
V.	THE PHILOSOPHY AND PHILANTHROPY OF MR LANG- WORTHY	45
VI.	THE PATERNAL SOLICITUDE OF MR LANGWORTHY .	55
VII.	MR POOLE'S DILEMMA	64
VIII.	MR PENNIFEATHER OPENS AN ACCOUNT . . .	73
IX.	PENNIFEATHER OPENS ANOTHER ACCOUNT, AND ROBERT MONTGOMERY CONCLUDES HIS NARRATIVE	78

BOOK II.

THE DOWNFALL OF HAVILAND.

THE NARRATIVE OF HAMISH STUART.

I. CHRISTINE O'MARA OFFERS SOME SOUND ADVICE .	97
II. TWO PROPOSALS	107
III. MR LANGWORTHY APPEARS IN A NEW CHARACTER .	120
IV. MR PENNIFEATHER REVIEWS THE SITUATION, AND SUSTAINS AN ATTACK	131
V. THE PATERNAL SOLICITUDE OF MR LANGWORTHY .	136
VI. MR LANGWORTHY DISCOURSES ON THE ETHICS OF GAMBLING	151
VII. THE RATIOCINATIONS OF MR PENNIFEATHER .	160
VIII. THE PRODUCTION OF THE OPERA, AND THE PROLOGUE TO THE TRAGEDY	164
IX. THE SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS	174
X. THE TRAGEDY IN THE MUSIC-ROOM.	185

BOOK III.

THE MARTYRDOM OF MARIA.

CONTRIBUTED BY HORATIO PROUDLY.

I. A DECLARATION: AND A CONSULTATION	199
II. PENNIFEATHER PROFFERS AN EXPLANATION; AND MARIA KEEPS, WITHOUT ENLIGHTENING, HER OWN COUNSEL	212
III. THE ADVENT OF ARTHUR MARSHALL	222
IV. THE BEGINNING OF THE TRIAL	230
V. THE END OF THE FIRST DAY	249
VI. MR PENNIFEATHER MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY .	257

VII. MR PROUDLY'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE ORATION OF ROBERT MONTGOMERY	269
VIII. THE JUDICIAL IMPARTIALITY OF LORD PITTENWEEM	280

BOOK IV.

FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER.

THE SOLUTION OF PENNIFEATHER'S PROBLEMS.

I. NEW TENANTS, BUT OLD FRIENDS	295
II. THE MISTS BEGIN TO CLEAR	310
III. MR LANGWORTHY'S REAPPEARANCE	327
IV. THE CONFESSION OF AN HONEST ROGUE	335
V. THE INCUBUS OF BROTHER JAMES	344
VI. MR PENNIFEATHER DEFENDS HIS ERRORS AND RE- MAINS A CONVINCED UNBELIEVER	350

THE HOUSE IN QUEEN ANNE SQUARE.

PROLOGUE.

THE ACCIDENT AT ELSPETH JUNCTION.

“*Bottom*. I have a device to make all well. Write me a Prologue.”
—*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act III. Sc. i.

HERE is a tale of a mystery as plain as a pikestaff, of logical deductions leading to ludicrous conclusions, of righteous retributions which the punctilious might shrink from as acts of deceit, of a *suppressio veri* that furthered the ends of justice, and a *suggestio falsi* that saved an obstinate old man from covering the blind goddess with ridicule. In spite of the gruesome nature of the introductory incident, however, this is not a chronicle of deeds of darkness. Though Pyramus may flourish his sword right valiantly, he is but Bottom the weaver after all.

In a storm of rain, hail, sleet, and other meteorological unpleasantness, the night Scottish express thundered northward through the darkness. It was before the era of corridor trains, and most of the passengers were penned in different compartments, with no means of communication except an uncertain cord, and a frowning notice of pains and penalties for making undue use

2 THE HOUSE IN QUEEN ANNE SQUARE

of it. The small hours of the morning had arrived, and those who could do so were snatching uneasy slumbers, lurching against one another in the third-class carriages, and bumping against the padded cushions of the first-class, as the train slackened speed, or hastened on, with a rush and roar, through gloomy cuttings and pitch-black tunnels. One of the carriages, however, was of the more modern type, with an interior alleyway at one side, and, in a certain compartment there, the occupants were not all asleep. There were three of them, two men and one woman. One, indeed—an elderly gentleman—was lying back in a corner seat, silent and inert. For greater comfort he had covered his face with a large handkerchief, and so overcome did he appear that his arms and body jerked and swayed with the motion of the train without disturbing his deep slumber. The other man was standing up, busily engaged in packing into a handbag a curious contrivance that looked like a conjurer's collapsible staircase.

While so doing he glanced from time to time at the recumbent figure, and at the close-drawn blinds on both sides.

"I thought we should never get rid of him, Min," he muttered to the woman, over his shoulder. "Already we are far too late!"

The woman—a pale-faced graceful girl of about twenty, with steel-grey eyes that flashed and glittered strangely in the flickering light cast by the single lamp, and a short crop of dark golden hair that fell unbound almost to her shoulders—shrugged slightly as she answered, "He amused me for the time, but he is well away. Didn't you notice that he is one of Us?"

"A neophyte, I should say," the man replied enigmatically.

Then suddenly, with a fearful side-look at the slumbering figure in the corner, he leant over the open window, hurled something into the darkness, and hastily drew the blind once more.

"Fool!" the woman hissed, "why did you do that? It may be found, and ruin all!"

The man looked at his hands and shuddered.

"There was blood on it," he said.

"He who cooks omelets breaks eggs," she returned callously. "But now," she continued, with grim resolution, "we are approaching the Elspeth curve. On that side nothing can be seen from the engine or the van. Be ready!"

Silently and stealthily she opened the carriage door, and, overcoming his repugnance with an effort, the man embraced the unresisting figure in the corner, whose arms fell heavily and lifelessly forward, while the head first jerked backward and then inclined downward on a loose neck, at a gruesome angle over the other's shoulder. Slowly and with laboured breathing the man raised his dreadful burden—and then, with a click and a snap, the blind of the corridor window flew up, and he found himself staring terror-stricken into a pair of frightened eyes, almost touching the glass.

As he stood rooted to the spot—his jaw dropped in blank amazement and stupor—suddenly there arose a weird shriek of metal grinding upon metal, a hiss of escaping steam, an uproar of elemental horror and confusion. The whole train leaped wildly over the embankment, and a tangled and confused mass of twisted iron, steel rails, blazing woodwork, and broken humanity lay writhing in the hollow beneath.

As the Judge sagely observed, in the course of one of the numerous actions for damages that ensued, it is surely a simple operation of applied dynamics to calculate the amount of cant requisite on a curve of a certain sharpness to give safety to a train rounding that curve at a certain rate of speed. Whether in this case the speed was too great or the cant too small, or whether the cause of the catastrophe was one or other of the numerous plausible suggestions made by an army of expert witnesses on both sides, sure it is that seldom has there been known a more grievous railway cataclysm than the train-wreck at Elspeth Junction on that tempestuous morning.

Among the purple patches of the newspaper accounts of the thrilling sights at the scene of the accident, none was read more eagerly or with deeper emotion by

4 THE HOUSE IN QUEEN ANNE SQUARE

the dwellers in the west end of Edinburgh than the following:—

“Under the seat of all that remained of one of the first-class carriages were found the bodies of two middle-aged gentlemen, locked in each other’s embrace. Both were taken out unconscious, and one, whose face had been terribly smashed by the falling timber, was found to be dead. A young lady, who happened to be in the same compartment, informs us that one of the two sufferers is no other than the well-known philanthropist, the immensely wealthy Mr Christopher Langworthy, who had recently purchased an estate in Inverdeeshire, and was at the time hastening home to take up his abode in Queen Anne Square, Edinburgh. The other gentleman is his twin-brother, Mr James Langworthy. It appears that, after years of estrangement, the two brothers had recently become reconciled; and it is indeed touching to think that, as the result of their reconciliation, they should, in that moment of awful peril, have thrown their arms about each other for mutual protection, as they must often have done in childhood’s happy days! As yet it is not known which of the two is the survivor. Miss Maria Langworthy, the charming and accomplished daughter of Mr Christopher, who is so well known and popular in Edinburgh society, although almost prostrated by grief, has hastened to the scene of the catastrophe.” *Later*: “It has now been ascertained that the survivor of the brothers is Mr Christopher Langworthy himself, who could indeed ill have been spared; and although severely injured, he will shortly be conveyed to Edinburgh. Inquiries at his house in Queen Anne Square, we are glad to say, have resulted in the assurance that he is doing well, and is likely to recover.”

BOOK I.

THE PERTINACITY OF PENNIFEATHER.

THE NARRATIVE OF ROBERT MONTGOMERY.

“I can counterfeit the deep tragedian,
Speak and look back, and pry on every side,
Intending deep suspicion.”

—*Richard III.*, Act III. Sc. v.

CHAPTER I.

THE INCEPTION OF THE OPERA.

AFTER fifteen years, all is over; and the mystery of the house in Queen Anne Square is at an end. My eyes have been opened in a single night; and I who, of all men, should surely have guessed the answer to the riddle, I, who have hitherto been considered responsible for the verdict, stand to-day contrite and ashamed, but yet jubilant withal, to know that truth has prevailed in the end.

The dear old days have never seemed far off, through all the years of stress and strain that have come and gone. Success undreamt of has come my way in the meantime. The defence of Maria Langworthy set my feet on the ladder; and hard, anxious, honest, sincere, and unremitting toil has done the rest. In a few days I shall relinquish the office of Lord Advocate and retire to the comparative repose of the Bench; but never, through all the scenes of my busy life at the Scottish Bar and in Parliament, has the fair image of my beautiful client been effaced from my memory. Never have I ceased to deplore the iniquitous and unjust verdict. Poor old Lord Pittenweem!—rough, tough, and crusty, obstinate and positive, who did not hesitate to describe my conduct as “a paradeful triumph over justice,” what would his feelings have been had he been spared to see this day?

I have just been reading again a bundle of my dear dead friend Harry Haviland's discarded manuscripts. Like Hamish Stuart and myself, he was a young member of the Scottish Bar. The three of us lived together in an

old house in Palace Street, Edinburgh—an unlikely trio, differing from one another in aim, temperament, and outlook, but bound together by the brotherhood of a common affection. Even now my heart leaps up when I, but hear their names. To-day, for the first time since we parted after that dreadful trial fifteen years ago, I met Hamish Stuart again—home from his wanderings, peaceful, prosperous, and happy. Before the crash came, he was the affianced husband of Maria; and, by an evil fortune, he was forced into the false position of a witness against her at the trial. Immediately afterwards, he threw up his practice at the Bar and disappeared somewhere in the Colonies, where his legal training and vast attainments ultimately led to great advancement. Now he is Sir Hamish, home once more, and still in the zenith of his powers. May God bless him!

As David loved Jonathan, so did Hamish love Harry Haviland—a brilliant being, if, in my own sober judgment, somewhat moody, flighty, and erratic. There was little that he could not do, if he tried. At all out-of-door sports he excelled; he was a painter of sorts; he played “the whole fiddle family,” as he used to say, from the violin to the four-stringed double bass; and, in moments of relaxation, he composed little melodies of haunting sweetness. But it was to literature that he devoted himself with intense industry. Who that has seen him striding about the music-room in Mr Christopher Langworthy’s house in Queen Anne Square, declaiming his own latest verses in tones of impassioned conviction, will ever forget Harry Haviland? Of course we all thought his stuff amazingly good. Perhaps we were not the most trustworthy judges, for none of the coterie of young men and women assembled there was likely to play the rôle of candid friend. But he was his own severest critic, and, after his untimely death, only three slim volumes of essays from his pen ever saw the light of day. Like the rest of us, he fell under the spell of Maria Langworthy—though that was before the announcement of her betrothal to Hamish Stuart—and in the music-room they constantly met and practised together, she singing, while he played an impromptu

obligato on the violin or 'cello, and her cousin and companion Christine O'Mara accompanied on the piano.

The time of which I speak was the early eighties, the egregious eighties, as some one has called them. Mr Christopher Langworthy, the world-famed philanthropist, had recently come to stay in Edinburgh, in the large corner house in Queen Anne Square, whose history is now known to all. He was a widower, said to be enormously wealthy, with one child, his daughter Maria. In consequence of serious injuries received in the Elspeth Junction railway accident, in which his twin-brother James perished, he was confined to his couch in the room upstairs originally intended for the drawing-room of the house. (How I eventually went there and what I learned will fall to be recorded in due course.) The only other occupants of the house were Saul Parker, Mr Langworthy's personal attendant, who hardly ever left him night or day, the domestics, who slept upstairs at the top of the house where the kitchen premises were situated, and his daughter Maria, who, with Christine O'Mara—a distant cousin of three-and-twenty, four years older than Maria—usually spent her time in a separate wing, although the bedrooms of the two cousins were situated on the first floor at the end of a corridor behind the drawing-room. In the light of what followed, it is necessary to describe the formation of that wing. It consisted of several rooms and offices at the back, and one large, lofty apartment, about three or four times the size of an ordinary billiard-room. This was the famous studio and music-room, where Maria lived and received her friends. At one end was a platform-stage, with a proscenium and scenery painted by Haviland and Maria herself as occasion required. Nothing pleased them better than to splash away with large flat brushes amongst distemper colours and evil-smelling "size," producing "back cloths" of distant views, with all the lights very bright and all the shadows very black, or "wings" of foliage, or "drop-curtains" of cherubic cupids and impossible artificial wreaths, while Hamish and I chorused approval or ironical disparagement from comfortable arm-chairs in

the "auditorium." As a rule, the stage was the resting-place of a grand piano and a few music-stands and stools. The polished floor of the rest of the room was covered here and there with Persian rugs and tiger and leopard skins. Two huge brick fireplaces with jambs and "ingle neuks" were placed diagonally at opposite corners, and about these were deep comfortable couches and chairs. The walls and inside roof were of dark oak panelling and rafters. There were some easels and canvases, a table covered with newspapers and periodicals, low bookcases filled with a vast variety of miscellaneous literature, and comfort and luxury everywhere. Altogether, it was as unlike the boudoir of an Edinburgh young lady of the eighties as one could well imagine.

Here were spent many happy evenings. The musical society of Edinburgh flocked to the chamber concerts; and the ladies of the West End were only too glad to act as chaperons to the talented and blooming heiress Miss Maria Langworthy, while all the men were her devoted slaves—so young and ardent was she, so vivacious and yet so gentle, so bewilderingly beautiful did she appear, so winsome, and so good!

The papers of poor Harry Haviland that I have unearthed have brought back to my mind, with vivid freshness, the scene of one summer afternoon. It is typical of many such scenes, and as it led up to the startling and inexplicable events which afterwards occurred, I shall do my best to recall it here.

Maria had just returned from a ride; and, still in her riding-habit, the glow of health and pleasure mantling in her cheek, her neat little hat jauntily pushed back from a brow around which the tendrils of her deep chestnut hair curled in escaping wavelets, she sat on the high fender-stool, engaged in eager talk with Charles Pennifeather, who was bending over her in his usual stilted attitude, his eyeglass firmly fixed in his eye, and his whole attention given to her vivacious chatter.

Pennifeather was an Englishman, and something of an enigma to the rest of us. He posed as a barrister who had come north to learn the inward meaning of our barbarous legal lore and language, with some thought of

ultimately joining our Bar. So he said; but Maria did not believe him, and he certainly did not carry conviction. He was, however, the essence of good nature, and seemingly master of his own time and inclination. He professed to have spent much energy, in anticipation of his visit to the north, preparing himself by a thorough course of the popular literature that passed in those days for a true picture of Scottish life and manners, and seemed genuinely bewildered by his discovery of the difference between fact and fiction.

"Mr Pennifeather!" Maria exclaimed, tossing back her well-poised head, with a favourite and characteristic gesture, and laughing a clear, ringing, boyish laugh, "you are really too delightful! Come, now, say it all over again!" and she swung her daintily-booted foot against the fender, as she beat one gauntlet glove on the pink palm of her little hand.

Pennifeather was usually a man of few words and crisp sentences.

"Seems to me," he grumbled, "that none of you northeners understand your own language!"

"Explain, now! 'Instance, shepherd, instance'!" cried Maria gaily.

"Is there a man among you," asked Pennifeather, looking round upon Haviland, seated at the piano, Christine O'Mara, and Miss M'Skimming—a prim and proper person of thirty summers or thereabouts—at the tea-table, and Hamish Stuart, Horatio Proudly, and myself, who were all lounging in deep chairs about one of the fireplaces, "is there a man among you, or a woman either, who calls a clergyman a 'meenister'?"

"Not one!" we assented cordially.

"Neither here nor anywhere else!" said Miss M'Skimming, with tart emphasis.

"Except in the Cockney comic papers," added Horatio Proudly, backing her up, in his usual tones of oratorical severity.

"Thought not!" replied Pennifeather, with resignation. "Neither does your conversation refer exclusively to country manses and dissenting parsons! But it's wrong, you know! The authorities that I have recently

consulted led me to believe that such persons form the only interesting class of inhabitants of this land of the mountain and the flood!"

"Down with the mountain!" quoth Maria.

"Dam the flood!" said Haviland sweetly, as he swept chords like an earthquake up and down the keys of the piano.

"Searched the whole town of Edinburgh," continued the Englishman. "Never found one manse, nor a parson with a face like a Greek god!"

"Quite the reverse!" sniffed Miss M'Skimming.

"Or with white hair flowing gracefully over scholarly shoulders. The whole thing's a fraud! Scotsmen, too, should be absolutely inarticulate in the presence of the fair sex. All the books say so. And"—gazing around with magnificent scorn—"only look at you!"

"Tell us," suggested Stuart mischievously, "about the joke you played on the macer!"

Pennifeather regarded the speaker through his eye-glass with sorrowful commiseration.

"But he didn't understand it, don't you know?" he replied considerably. "No Scotsman *can* understand a joke. I have noticed that."

"Tell us," said Maria expectantly, "the joke that the macer could not understand."

"I asked him," said Pennifeather gravely, "if he had ever seen an old light idle."

"An old light idle?" Maria echoed blankly.

"Yes! that's the joke; the things you read about in Barrie, don't you know?"

"Ah! You mean an Auld Licht Idyll!" she gasped. "I see. Well? Go on!"

"Well, he said he had. He also said that he possessed one."

"Yes?"

"I offered him," Pennifeather continued impressively, "half-a-sovereign if he would show it me. That again was a joke."

"But again he did not see it?" Maria asked, twinkling and beaming.

"Not a bit! He marched me miles and miles, till we

came to his so-called house. There he took me in, and exhibited an ancient paraffin lamp."

"A paraffin lamp?" Maria repeated.

"Yes! Said it was the oldest light he had, and it had been idle for the last five years, during which time he had used gas!"

Miss M'Skimming shook her head in mournful sympathy.

"But he accepted the half-sovereign?" she inquired anxiously.

"He did!" Pennifeather replied, with concentrated bitterness.

"You are quite right!" said Miss M'Skimming, after a pause for consideration. "Such people do *not* understand a joke!"

"The typical Scot of days of old," broke in Horatio Proudly, who always followed the lead of Miss M'Skimming, "is dead as the dodo!"

"Ripping!" laughed Haviland at the piano, "Horatio on the stump, Proudly the magniloquent and grandiloquent bursts unintentionally into anapæsts and iambs! 'The typical Scot of days of old is dead as is the dodo'!"

Then he rippled out a tune, turning and twisting the line to the melody.

"'The typical Scot of days of old, di-dum, di-dum, di.' I say, what's the plural of 'dodo'?" he asked suddenly.

"'Dodoes'!" cried Maria.

"Dodoesn't!" he retorted, smiling.

"'Dodi,—dodoi,—doda'!" we all tried in turn.

"Yes, that's it," he cried in triumph, "at least it ought to be, it must be, for the rhyme! One moment! Di-dum, di-di, di—— How would this do?"

And, without a moment's hesitation, he trolled out, in a rich baritone, the lines—

"In me the modern type behold
Of Caledonia, stern and bold,—
The typical Scot of days of old
Is dead, as are the doda!
He came, like them, of a mythical tribe,
Begotten of Saxon jeer and gibe—
But the only *Scotch* which I imbibe
Is mingled first with soda!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted Pennifeather, explosively and unexpectedly. Then with resumed sudden seriousness, "Beastly funny! and, in my experience, absolutely true!"

"Plain it is to me," observed Horatio Proudly, with the air of a discoverer, "that our friend has a marvellous facility in improvisation."

He always was, as he still is, a dear good soul, Proudly; but, even then, he was an artist in language, never using one short word when fifteen long ones would do as well.

"It is simply vivid!" Maria cooed delightedly.

"Vivid," I may say, was a sort of catchword adjective, used by us all to describe anything at once startling, out of the common, and pleasurable.

"Sing it again, Harry!" she continued, rising and running to a side-table, "and Christine, dear, come and write it down!"

"It is the usual futile piffle," Harry grumbled, though evidently rather pleased, "but, if you want it, here goes!"

Accordingly he sang the verse once more to a catchy and characteristic air, which he seemed to invent as he went along with as little effort as the words had cost him. In the meantime, Christine O'Mara, in answer to Maria's impulsive appeal, seated herself at the writing-table, and took down the words as they now lie before me.

Christine O'Mara was one of those mouse-like persons who seem to court obscurity. She was amongst us, and yet somehow never seemed of us. Some said that she bore a certain resemblance to Maria herself, but I could never see it. In manner, behaviour, and demeanour she seemed to me her direct opposite. Maria was always gay, talkative, and appreciative, open as the day, blithe and lively, full of the joy of youth. Christine was demure, quiet, and secretive, never asserting herself, seldom venturing an opinion, ready to do anything required of her, but not demonstrative or originating. She was obviously devoted to her cousin, often seeming to efface herself that Maria might shine more brightly.

Her figure was rather ungainly, flat-chested, and stooping, one shoulder being somewhat higher than the other. She dressed with nun-like simplicity, wearing her thick black hair, which bunched out over her ears and at the nape of her neck, in thick coils primly braided. It was obvious that she had caught Maria's trick of tossing back her head with a little jerk now and then, which, in her case, seemed incongruous enough, seeing that she had no rebellious curls to control.

Pennifeather stepped across the room, and peered through his glass over her shoulder as she wrote.

"Neat, by Jove!" he remarked pleasantly, "and legible! Do much in this way, Miss O'Mara?"

She coloured slightly as she replied—

"I do a good deal of writing for Mr—for my uncle Christopher, upstairs."

"Ah! Of course!" he answered.

"Now, read what you have written, my dear Christine!" said Miss M'Skimming.

"Oh! bother! Let it rest," exclaimed Haviland pettishly, as he rose from the piano and leaped lightly from the platform to the floor. "It is a verse, it is true, but 'tis nothing to make a song about!"

"Why not make a song of it?" Hamish Stuart inquired lazily. "You have one verse and a tune finished already. All you want now is two more verses and a high note at the end. Call it 'The Wail of the Misunderstood' and your fortune is made!"

"Rot!" grinned Harry. "It is only futile piffle, as I said before. Come!—let us have some real music!"

"The thing is rot, undoubtedly," I ventured, "but for that very reason it appears to me to contain the germ of potential success. It sounds like part of the opening chorus of a comic opera."

In a moment Maria was dancing on the polished floor, her lips parted, and her brilliant eyes sparkling with expectant merriment.

"Oh! Robert!" she exclaimed breathlessly, "for once you positively coruscate! Why should not we do a whole comic opera—here, in this room? That would be something positively vivid!"

Haviland looked at her, smiling, a little wistfully, I thought.

"And does Her Majesty command a comic opera?" he inquired whimsically. "Then it shall be done. What is it to be about?"

"The usual thing!" Maria returned airily. "We must have a chorus of men, and a chorus of girls; and all the girls must be dressed exactly alike, and all the men. There shall be two acts, and a tenor hero and a soprano heroine, and a bass comic villain and a contralto virago. *You* know!" she concluded, with an explanatory wave of her arm and toss of her curls.

"Helpful, very!" said Haviland, as he sounded a quiet chord on the piano, "and who is to be the hero?"

"Why," laughed Maria, gaily looking round, and passing provokingly by Hamish, Proudly, and me—"why, Mr Pennifeather, of course! Who else?"

"Can't sing a note!" that worthy growled apprehensively.

"That, I assure you, is no objection," replied Harry. "This is to be a comic opera; and who shall dare to say that the British race lacks humour when one considers the native lyric stage?"

"And Miss Maria Langworthy, the bird-like soprano, the heroine, I suppose?" he queried.

"*Cela va sans dire!*" chanted Proudly, who was nothing if not loyal.

"So far so good," mused Haviland, by this time at the table and biting a pen, "but, as to plot now? We really must have a plot—something unusual, local, but not dug from the kailyard!"

"It appears to me," I suggested again, "that the position of Pennifeather might give you an idea—an expectant Southerner disappointed in his search for the Scotsman depicted by the modern Scotch novelists!"

"Robert has hit it!" exclaimed Haviland, delightedly banging the table, "on the spot as usual! Now give us a background of some real national institution to work on, something indigenous and characteristic!"

"What could be more typical," cried Miss M'Skimming, who was beginning to take an interest in the game,

"than the Parliament House? I am sure my heart bleeds for the poor young advocates there, dressed up in wigs and gowns, treading the boards——"

"Glorious!" exclaimed Maria, clapping her hands. "Dearest Honoria, you have given us our chorus of men—all young advocates, all 'treading the boards,' and all dressed exactly alike! Don't you see it, Harry?"

"I have a glimmering!" Haviland acquiesced. "Opening Scene, the Parliament House; Chorus of Advocates in wig and gown, advancing and retiring, with all the graceful but monotonous regularity of the strophe and antistrophe of a Greek Chorus, and all lamenting their fate. So far, so good!"

"Then do it, my dear boy," said Hamish, smiling at him with almost parental fondness.

Haviland rubbed his hair over his eyes, and pushed it back again.

"Of course it can be done," he said, after a moment's consideration, "but had we not better proceed with the plot first?"

"Oh! the plot is sure to come all right!" said Hamish buoyantly—not being himself a writer of fiction. "Give us your opening chorus, and let us get it down in black and white! Then the thing will shape itself."

Harry looked at him with unseeing eyes, drummed for a little on the table, rose and leaped at the piano, hummed the tune already composed, jumped down again, and paced about the floor; while Maria followed his movements with glowing expectancy, and unconsciously dramatic, sympathetic gestures.

"All right!" he shouted at last, striding more furiously about the room; "now I'm ready! Take your pens and proceed!"

CHAPTER II.

THE OPENING CHORUS AND THE CLOSING FLOWERS.

THERE was no playfulness about what followed, no treating the matter in a spirit of levity as if it was a huge joke. We were all as soberly and seriously in earnest as if we were transcribing a State paper of international diplomatic moment. The copy which I took down that day to Harry's dictation, with scarcely a pause, is still one of my most treasured possessions. This is it:—

“Advocates, advancing and retiring in couples, in a scene representing the Parliament House, Edinburgh, sing in chorus :

I.

“’Tis the thing to do, so two by two
 We haunt this historic spot,—
 And day by day we march this way
 Nor vary one tittle or jot ;
 But W.S. and S.S.C.
 Forbear to present one brief or fee,—
 So it seems to me, as it seems to thee,
 This perambulation’s rot !
 Pure rot !
 And our law we have all forgot !

II.

When we first got a call to this learned hall,
 We were primed with legal lore,
 Our brains grew muddy with midnight study,
 And our heads swelled more and more ;
 And, thus prepared, the result you see,—

With ne'er a brief and not one fee,
Like beasts in a menagerie
We pace this boarded floor !
Hooroar !
As our fathers paced before ! ”

"Certainly," said Pennifeather to Miss M'Skimming, who was looking on in breathless amazement, "this is the most marvellously prosaic member of the slowest and sedatest people I ever met!"

"The laddie's fey!" ejaculated that lady, as she watched the perambulations of the composer.

"Now!" cried Harry, casting himself full length upon a sofa, his hands behind his head, "we bring in the verse already done, sung by one of the principals, 'In me the modern type behold!' and so on. Then Pennifeather, the Englishman trying to be a Scot, marches down the middle, singing to the tune of 'Blue Bonnets over the Border'—

‘ March ! march ! thus we’re with fun employed,—
Some may be sheriffs, but none a recorder ;
March ! march ! tyros as yet untried,—
Jovial Counsel from over the Border !’

Got that?"

"Yes!" we all exclaimed, scribbling furiously.

"Then the chorus replies," Harry continued, rumpling his hair more than ever, and speaking faster—

“ ‘ Oh ! cease that rot, perfervid Scot !
We have heard these strains before,
Times are out of joint, and, more to the point,
We forget our legal lore !
But perambulation we preserve
With stagnant brain and tortured nerve,—
Though no possible purpose it can serve
To pace this boarded floor !
And more—
It’s a bit of a beastly bore ! ’

Got that?"

"Yes!" we cried feverishly again.

"Then, to finish, Pennifeather sings, to the tune 'The Cameron Men'—

'I hear their lamentations sounding

Up to the rafters afar !

Their swift ringing footsteps are trampling the boards !

'Tis the march of the junior Bar !

Chorus.—'Tis the march,

'Tis the march,

'Tis the march of—ha ! ha-ha ! ha-ha !

"There," sighed Harry, rising and stretching himself, "there's your opening chorus ! For Heaven's sake, Maria, give me a cigarette and a cup of tea !"

Of course the thing was a pure *tour de force*, but it seemed, and I believe was, all so spontaneous, so unstudied, vigorous, and graphic, betraying, as it did to those who suffered under the ferocious custom that it depicted, such a luminous and ironical insight into the mood of mind that the custom engenders in many generous youths, that we were all rather overcome with astonishment as well as delight.

"Give the poor dear the tea and tobacco he craves !" cried Maria sympathetically. "In the meantime let me jot down the notes."

As lightly as a bird, she fluttered on to the platform, seated herself at the piano, and proceeded, with quick-witted dexterity and accuracy, to pick out bar after bar of the melodies that Harry had invented and adapted, and to note them down on a blank sheet of manuscript music-paper.

Meantime Christine had sounded an electric bell, and in a moment or two a panel in the inner wall of the room flew open, and a man-servant, carrying a tray, stepped out and began to prepare the tea-table.

"I never see this performance," said Hamish, as he lighted a cigarette after asking permission, "but I think of the demon in the pantomime, or the last act of the 'Tales from Hoffman.'"

"Our familiar spirits, however," said Christine at the table, "come from above, not from below."

Pennifeather went across to the open panel, and examined it curiously through his eyeglass.

"Monstrously convenient arrangement this !" he remarked, peering in.

Christine looked rather displeased.

"It is only an ordinary electric lift from the kitchen premises in the top flat," she answered shortly.

"Ha!" said Pennifeather.

"I am no Paul Pry," observed Horatio Proudly—he little knew his sobriquet in the Parliament House—"but, may I ask, why?"

"To keep our tea hot, of course," Maria chanted looking up from her work, "and to get from here to the top of the house!"

"A combination of the proverbial miller's hat and the perambulating hen!" quoth Harry from his sofa. "Don't tap the panels, Pennifeather! You are out of time, and Maria is composing."

Pennifeather turned apologetically.

"I am afraid," he said jerkily—"unduly inquisitive. Sorry! I was looking for more surprises."

"There are none," said Christine, almost sharply.

"Now Christine! Christine!" Maria cried merrily. "One never knows. This is the house of——"

At that moment a sudden clatter and succession of rap emanated from a corner of the room, under a window placed high in the wall, on the level of the lane outside. Christine rose without a word, drew aside a little shutter, and in fell a large bundle of letters, the envelopes of which she proceeded to examine methodically.

"None for you, Maria," she said. "These are for me," and she concealed a few of them in the bodice of her dress. "We get all the correspondence for the household delivered here," she explained, "in order to avoid noise at the front door, and the disturbance of Uncle Christopher."

Placing the rest of the letters on a tray she handed them to the servant, who immediately shut himself into the lift and disappeared, leaving the wall once more panelled, without a trace of the position of the opening.

Then, quite placidly, Christine returned to the tea-table.

"Exit the demon!" said Pennifeather, looking rather thoughtfully at the window and the wall where the lift had been.

I had seen the same thing happen so frequently that I

was rather amused at the perplexity, real or assumed, with which Pennifeather seemed to regard it.

"Truly a 'vivid' room this for a French farce, or a modern edition of a medieval tragedy!" cried Harry lightly. "We must work one out together here some day, Maria!"

"I vote for tragedy!" quoth Maria gaily.

"If this be tragedy, who'd be gay.
Tragedy let it be!"

sang Harry, waving his teacup.

Christine sat primly, with her eyes downcast, saying never a word.

"Hullo!" suddenly exclaimed Harry, who was moving about, "your oriental flowers are fading fast! They are withering on the virgin stem, neither growing nor living, but dying in single blessedness!"

He was bending over some wonderful rich tropical blooms in tall glasses that stood in a far-off corner of the room.

"Oh! they'll revive again all right," said Maria carelessly; "Christine holds the secret of their perpetual youth."

"I never saw such lovely specimens," observed Horatio Proudly, "except in some connoisseur's hot-house. Orchids of the rarest——"

"Water," laughed Maria; "you are quite right! the very rarest water! I have trouble enough to procure it from the chemist, I assure you!"

Harry had become strangely white and still, as he caressed with tentative finger the velvety surface of the gorgeous exotic plants that seemed to distil a peculiar overpowering, enervating fragrance at his touch.

I thought Christine was eyeing him with a certain concentrated earnestness, most unusual in that unobservant young person.

"What's the matter, old chap?" asked Hamish heartily, smacking him on the back.

Harry recovered himself with a start.

"I must have been dreaming," he said apologetically;

"the overpowering odour seemed almost to recall to me something that is always escaping my effort to remember, something divinely pleasant, followed by something else I would fain forget!" and he gazed moodily on the floor, standing inert and listless.

"How romantic!" exclaimed Maria brightly. "I always hated the horrid things, but now I *must* sniff them to discover if they give *me* creeps!" and she edged up to the flowers.

In a moment Christine was in front of her, calm and placid, but displaying a certain amount of unusual masterfulness.

"No!" she said, quietly but decisively. "They are mine, Maria! They are almost dead, and their scent is dangerous—to some. I am exempt," she explained to us, almost apologetically, "I live with the blooms. They give us beauty, form, and fragrance, but the secret of it all is rather shocking. They are fed on arsenic!"

Then she carried the formidable plants to the lift, and sent them out of the room.

Maria seemed rather put out at being treated as a child.

"She never *will* let me smell those flowers!" she pouted. "I am sure if they cannot harm Harry they won't hurt me. However," she added contritely, kissing her cousin, "you are dear, kind, careful godmother, and I forgive you."

I noticed that Christine had kept her head carefully averted from the blooms as she carried them. Her cheeks were now slightly flushed, and her grey-green eyes almost as bright as Maria's own when she answered composedly—

"When they fade and die their scent is unwholesome. Once revived by their natural food, they are rendered harmless."

"Nurtured on poison!" exclaimed Proudly oracularly, "and yet giving forth a healthful, if overpowering, fragrance and odour! Strange contradiction! And to think that if one of us were accidentally to drink the fluid that nourishes them——"

"Drink your tea instead!" said Hamish good-natur-

edly, "and let us be off! I have a consultation at six o'clock."

Harry seemed now to have completely recovered from his obsession.

"Oh! Hamish," he exclaimed mockingly, "renegade! to think of deserting a half-finished work of art in the shape of a more or less immortal opera—words and music while you wait!—to consult with bucolic clients and unidea'd solicitors! Ah! well—

‘Hurrah for the multiplepounding!
The multiplepounding hurrah!’"

"Hamish has his bread and butter to earn," said Maria, bridling.

"While we drink the tea of idleness, and consume the Sally Lunn of a blameless life!" answered Harry, shaking his head sadly.

"But I thought your composition was over for the day!" said Hamish indulgently.

"Over!" cried Harry, who, I am quite sure, had never given another thought to the *magnum opus*—"why, we were just beginning! Where were we, by the way?"

Once more Maria rattled over the result of the composition.

"That's not bad!" said Harry approvingly. "Now for the chorus of girls—what are they to be? a contrast, characteristically, but not aggressively national. No kilts or sporrans, porridge or whisky, tolerated!"

After much careful and erudite consideration, it was unanimously agreed that a chorus of fisher-girls from Newhaven, in their appropriate costume—"maidens of the matchless hose, and petticoats red and yellow," as Harry put it—would precisely meet the case.

Then the question arose how to bring them, with any semblance of plausibility, into the Parliament House.

"The obvious reason for going there," said Pennifeather suggestively, "is because one has nothing better to do."

"Good!" Harry agreed, with a chuckle, "but too subtle."

"Suppose," Maria proposed, "that you make them all have actions for breach of promise against the Judges!"

"Or the macers!" remarked Pennifeather maliciously.

"Good again, but too hackneyed," Harry commented. "The *motif*, however, is there all right. But surely there must be some other kinds of actions, Montgomery, than actions for breach of promise!" he propounded, with apparent perplexity.

"*Poseur!*" I scoffed. "You can't have forgotten all the little law you ever knew! Your own 'great first cause least understood' was about a servitude of right of passage, if I remember rightly!"

"Servitude! servitude!" murmured Harry musingly, "surely I have heard the word before! I always associate it with old Braxfield's Homeric laughter when he pictured Jamie Boswell at the English Bar, trying to call a multiplepounding an interpleader, and a prædial rural servitude an easement!"

"Braxfield never said that!" Hamish growled, "or anything half so good!"

"Didn't he?" asked Harry, twinkling. "Then he should have said it. I'll say it for him!"

"Excellent!" chuckled Proudly; "but I can think of no servitude in which fisher-girls could have a patrimonial interest—*iter, actus, via, aqueductus*——"

"What about a right to spread their nets?" I suggested.

"Again Robert is on the spot!" shouted Harry—"a right to dry their nets on the—er—Mashiefield golf links! That gives you the second act, and the appropriate change of dress."

"But I thought you objected to my fishwives!" Maria pouted.

"My dear Min," replied Harry, addressing her by a pet name that I had never heard before, which made Pennifeather, and Christine too, prick up their ears—"my dear Min, they shall not be real fishwives! They shall be masqueraders. We shall make them all English girls—the fearless band of females whose watchword is Freedom and Philanthropy—who disguise themselves in order to plead the cause of the oppressed fisherwomen

in person. Of course all the English girls eventually pair off with the Scottish Counsel! 'Tis the way of the world!"

"Then what about me?" asked Pennifeather.

"We shall have one Scotch girl—the heroine—who shall marry the Englishman—*Vive l'entente cordiale!* I foresee great possibilities!"

"And how is it all to end?" asked the practical Miss M'Skimming. She was really as much intrigued as any of us.

"We shall adjourn," said Harry meditatively, "to the Mashiefield links, as the Judges have gone there to play golf. They are all members of the club, and therefore decline jurisdiction. In these circumstances their duty devolves upon—er——"

"The macer!" suggested Pennifeather solemnly.

"The macer? Good!" cried Harry with enthusiasm. "The macer shall be the bass comic relief. He accepts jurisdiction. Then it turns out somehow that he himself has a prior claim to the putting-green—some old-world right—help me, Robert!"

"Say a right of 'feal and divot'!" I suggested.

"Glorious!" he replied—"a right to cart away the whole blessed place and thatch his house withal! So he marries the contralto lady, and the rest pair off, the real fishwives having sent word that they have no nets to dry because their husbands and sweethearts have all turned trawlers. How does that strike you?"

"It sounds a masterpiece," I said drily; "but when shall we see it?"

"It sounds like tomfoolery," Harry replied, not in the least chagrined; "but give me a week and you may call your first rehearsal!"

So with many farewells, we four men, Pennifeather, Proudly, Hamish, and I, went out by the side door, leaving Harry already grasping his fiddle, while Christine was taking her place at the piano, and Maria was bending her sweet face over a portfolio of loose music.

Thus was the stage prepared for the first act of the coming tragedy.

CHAPTER III.

MR PENNIFEATHER GROWS CURIOUS.

HAMISH left us at the corner of the Square to keep his appointment with his senior in Moray Place, then the Mecca of successful advocates.

As the rest of us journeyed on towards Princes Street, dear old Proudly waxed ruminative and oratorical.

"Considering all that has come and gone," he said, "and the disappointing circumstances which have eventuated, marvellous it is to me that Maria retains her spirit and vivacity!"

Pennifeather regarded him impassively.

"She seems a remarkably intelligent young woman," was all that he said.

"Intelligent! you block of marble!" exclaimed Proudly, in a burst of enthusiasm, "she is divine!"

"Ha!" answered Pennifeather, as before. Then turning to me, he asked, "Known her long?"

"Practically all her life," I replied.

Pennifeather was evidently surprised.

"Thought that they had just come to Edinburgh," he exclaimed, and then abruptly changed the subject.

By this time we had arrived at the door of the Megatherium Club; and Proudly, making an excuse of business—poor fellow! it was a very small excuse in those days—bade us farewell.

"Are you going in there?" he asked. "Then good-bye! 'Tis the theatre of gossip and grumbles, and the grave of reputations! I leave my character in your hands," and with this Parthian shaft he left us.

"Doing anything to-night?" Pennifeather inquired, as he picked up a newspaper in the reading-room.

"Very little, I am sorry to say," I answered, smiling.

"Then dine with me here in half an hour. Do! I'm bored stiff!" and he smothered a yawn behind his hand.

It was not what one might call a cordial invitation; but I liked the fellow, and his dilettante ways amused me.

"I hardly know," I answered hesitatingly. "Hamish and Harry will be at home, and——"

"Stuart will be too busy to miss you," he broke in. "He has some intricate action about a water-supply district—whatever that means—to-morrow, that will keep him up all night. Haviland will probably be at the play, or—er—elsewhere," he stammered slightly; "besides, I want to consult you about a small matter."

"Very good!" I said after a time. "I must go home now. If there are no papers for me—and I don't expect any—I shall be here in half an hour."

"Right!" he responded, looking at the clock. "Seven o'clock now—say quarter to eight," and, yawning again, he buried himself in the evening paper.

I flatter myself that I know something of cross-examination. Since that time I have had plenty of experience, and have studied the methods of princes of the art. But I have frequently smiled, with half-resentful admiration, over the skill with which the stolid and somewhat vacuous Pennifeather—as I then thought him—succeeded that evening in extracting from me a vast amount of valuable information, without giving an inkling of what he was really intent upon discovering.

Seated after dinner in a corner of the smoking-room, we had been talking "shop" a good deal, as is the habit of briefless brethren of the Bar. We had discussed banking law, "insurable interests," fraud and forgery, and insensibly the conversation veered round to the difference in the laws of our two countries in regard to actions of damages for wrongs, or "torts" as, quite rightly, he preferred to call them.

He seemed much intrigued by the information that,

with us, a parent has a right, at common law, to bring an action of damages against one who has negligently caused the death of his child.

"And *vice versa*?" he asked.

"Certainly!" I replied.

"The doctrine, I suppose," he answered thoughtfully, "rests on the mutual obligation of support, in cases of necessity?"

"Partly, I believe," I answered with a shrug. "My own view is that it rests on no principle at all. It is merely an arbitrary exception to the general rule of law."

"I see," said Pennifeather, flicking the ash from his cigar. "Now, take the case of a brother being killed by negligence—what then?"

"A surviving brother or sister has no right of action," I said.

"In no case?" he asked, looking up, "not even if the brother who was killed had been the sole support of the survivor?"

"No matter," I replied. "Collaterals have no title to sue, either for pecuniary loss or for balm to their wounded feelings."

He dropped his eyeglass and stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"No title to sue!" he echoed, staring meditatively into the fire. "You are sure of that?"

"It is elementary," I responded, rather nettled.

"Then," said Pennifeather, sticking his eyeglass in his eye once more and glaring at me, "I'm blessed if I understand the game at all!"

"As I am not taking a hand in any game, so far as I know," I answered stiffly, "I am afraid I can be of no assistance."

"My dear fellow!" Pennifeather exclaimed, springing up, "I beg your pardon! A little problem that I have been asked to solve is troubling me rather, and your information has been most valuable. Come, let us talk of something else! Have a drink?"

He rang the bell and ordered some whisky-and-soda.

"Most interesting exhibition of intellectual dexterity

by Haviland this afternoon," he remarked after a pause. "Wonderful chap that, it seems to me!"

Of course he could not have hit upon a more congenial theme, and for some minutes I dilated upon the manifold talents and engaging versatilities of my friend. Naturally, this brought the conversation round to the house in Queen Anne Square.

"It used to be a girls' school," I observed.

"Indeed?"

"Yes. My young sister was there at the same time as Maria Langworthy. The room in which we were to-day was then a schoolroom."

"Oh!" said Pennifeather, "I thought it had been specially built for Miss Langworthy by her father."

"Only altered," I answered, "and not altogether to Maria's liking, I am afraid."

"How so?" he asked.

"You know, of course, that Mr Langworthy was in the Elspeth Junction railway accident six months ago?"

"So I had heard," he replied.

"And although he escaped with his life," I went on, "it seems to have made a great change in him in all sorts of ways."

"For instance?"

"For instance, in regard even to the house. He was left a widower, somewhere abroad, at Maria's birth, and he brought her to Edinburgh when she was a mite of five or six. For years she lived with the family of his solicitor, Edgar Poole, the Writer to the Signet. Then she went to school in Queen Anne Square. At irregular intervals he used to tear himself from his business in Burma, or India, or Timbuctoo, or wherever it was, and rush home to Maria. They were devoted to each other, and, on the last occasion that he was here, three years ago, he promised that, when she came to be nineteen, he would retire for good. Accordingly he bought a lovely place in Inverdeeshire, and acquired the lease of the house in Queen Anne Square through his solicitor, Edgar Poole. It was all planned out by correspondence between the father and daughter. Maria was to have the whole first floor, drawing-room and

all the rest of it, and the old schoolroom was to be transformed into a room for music. Her father was to content himself with a library behind the dining-room on the ground floor, but made no secret of the fact that the music-room would see him more often than his own quarters. But I am boring you?"

"Not at all," said Pennifeather, and, to the credit of his politeness be it said, he seemed to listen most attentively. "Thunderingly interesting, I assure you!"

"Maria's cup of happiness overflowed," I continued, "for she is a sympathetic child—when her father announced that he had forgiven and become reconciled to his twin-brother James—between ourselves, rather a ruffian, I am told! They were actually in the train accident together."

"So I remember reading," Pennifeather observed.

"Whether it was the shock of James's death, so soon after the reconciliation——"

"He was killed, then?" Pennifeather interrupted.

"I understand so," I replied—"or whether it be that the spinal mischief he suffered has affected his brain, he has become a changed man."

"In what way?"

"In many ways, I believe. His memory is much affected, and Maria almost weeps over his forgetfulness of their old playtimes when he used to return here from abroad."

"Yes," said Pennifeather encouragingly, "anything more?"

"He has become extremely eccentric in his conduct of his affairs, at times charitable to the point of ridiculous extravagance, at other times almost parsimonious and niggardly. For instance, the first unlikely thing that he did, after settling down in Queen Anne Square, was to sell the estate in Inverdeeshire that he had just acquired."

"And how did Miss Langworthy take that? Was she surprised?"

"Very much so, and deeply grieved, because he had practically given the place to her. But she is a loyal child, and accepts the situation without a murmur."

"But I think you said something about a change in the planning out of the house itself."

"Yes," I answered. "A few days after the accident he sent Christine O'Mara with a host of workmen to make alterations there. No one had ever heard of Christine O'Mara before, and I think her arrival was rather a shock to Maria. However, she is, as you see, an inoffensive creature. She explained that she acted as Mr Langworthy's confidential secretary and as dispenser of his charities. Indeed, she turns out to be a distant cousin of the family, and Maria and she are now bosom friends. But Maria, poor girl, had to submit to have the drawing-room taken from her, that her father might lie there in a large airy room. There was, indeed, some talk of both girls sleeping downstairs in rooms behind the music-room, but Maria rebelled, and the scheme fell through. The kitchen premises are at the top of the house, shut off by a heavy door; and electric lifts, one of which you saw to-day, were installed."

"How many?" Pennifeather inquired inquisitively.

"I don't know," I answered.

"The unfortunate result of it all, then, is," Pennifeather resumed, after a slight interval, "that Miss Langworthy is hardly leading the life that she anticipated?"

"Naturally, she is rather disappointed," I returned, "but her sunny nature triumphs over all. She tells me that her father is as fond of her as ever, though less demonstrative than he used to be. It is a great grief to her to see him lying there helpless; but the doctors can find no organic lesion, and there seems no reason why he may not be out and about soon. In the meantime Maria gets Mrs Poole—the only mother she ever knew—to take care of her when necessary, though she is well able to take care of herself, and some day——"

"She may marry, of course," Pennifeather assented as I paused; "and, whether his name be Haviland, or Stuart, or——"

"Or Pennifeather," I suggested slyly.

"Or Pennifeather," he agreed, smiling, "he will be a

man to be envied. And so that room was once the schoolroom!" he continued, harking back once more. "Changed days for those who knew it then!"

"And a changed room," I returned.

"Structurally? Or only in the furnishings?"

"Both, I think. It seems to me narrower than it was when I saw it as a child."

"Narrower?" answered Pennifeather thoughtfully. "All rooms look smaller than they appeared to childish eyes. That may account for it."

"It may be so," I answered, "but I cannot help thinking that the inner wall has been brought forward considerably."

Pennifeather's eyebrows went up.

"The lift, of course!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"But why should an entire new partition be erected along the side of a room to accommodate one lift?" I objected.

"Symmetry, symmetry," he answered lightly. "By the way, I thought Miss Christine rather resented my curiosity this afternoon."

"Christine!" I laughed. "Christine is a piece of furniture, an inarticulate piano-pounder. Bless you! she has not spirit enough to resent your pulling the house down if you wanted to."

"No?" he interrogated. "Seems a pity, though, that a girl who might be quite pretty if properly gowned, should make her figure worse than it is by wearing these clothes! But I suppose her master insists."

"You mean Mr Langworthy?" I asked. "I shouldn't think so. Christine appears to me to be a young woman of no taste or judgment, and, I should think, very little discernment."

He looked at me curiously, almost incredulously, and then laughed.

"She has taste in flowers, at any rate," he said. "I never saw any blooms more marvellous."

"Or more hideous," I answered with a wry face. "If these are specimens of Christine's taste, it is——"

"Perverted?" he suggested. "Perhaps you are right!"

I looked at my watch, and rose to go.

"Are you leaving me?" he inquired, looking up. "Well, we have had a most interesting chat, though we have touched upon neither ministers nor manses. By the way," he added, as if the result of an afterthought, "one other question before you go—the distinctive peculiarities of your law always interest me. What is 'legitim'?"

"Oh! Good-night!" I said derisively.

"But I am in dead earnest, and really want to know," he added with a perfectly serious face; "I have a small bet on."

"You really want to know?" I inquired incredulously.

"Certainly!"

So I told him—the children's share of a deceased father's personal estate—one-third if he leaves a widow, and one-half if he does not.

"Quite," said Pennifeather. "I am capable of appreciating the distinction. And can a father deprive his children of this share?"

"You mean, by will?"

"Yes."

"Not unless they have been provided for during his life, and have somehow agreed to forgo their claim," I returned.

"I see," said Pennifeather with a laugh, throwing the end of his cigarette in the fire. "So, however I may win the good graces of Mr Langworthy, he could bequeath only half of his millions to me?"

"That is all," I answered. "Maria's claim to her own half is indefeasible."

"Then," said my host, "as I already remarked, whether his name be Haviland, Proudly, Stuart, or Montgomery, he will be a lucky man."

"Leave me out, and substitute Pennifeather," I laughed. "I am not entering for this race."

Again he gave me that long, incredulous stare.

"Is that really so?" he inquired.

"Honour bright!" I replied.

He pondered for a moment or two.

"When next you see Mr Langworthy——" he began.

"I never see him nowadays, have not since the accident," I interrupted.

"But you will," he responded emphatically, "before the end of this week, unless I am much mistaken; and, when you do, you will probably remember this conversation. It may be of the utmost moment to those whom you know and love that you should tell me whether I am right or wrong! Good-night!"

I was much impressed by the sudden seriousness of his look and demeanour as he spoke these words, almost solemnly. And yet nothing had passed between us of the slightest importance to any human being, so far as I could see. I pondered the matter, in some wonder and with a certain misgiving, as I wended my way homewards. At last, dismissing it as mere idle and meaningless vapour, I turned my latch-key in the door of our Palace Street house, shut it with a bang, and, after looking in to nod "good-night" to Hamish, hard at work, went straight to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

HARRY DIRECTS A REHEARSAL: AND PENNIFEATHER
PROCEEDS TO INVESTIGATE.

DURING the next few days I saw nothing of Pennifeather—who had suddenly gone south, as I heard, leaving his belongings in the club—and very little of my house companions, each of whom was busily engaged in his own way. Hamish was daily carrying on a wordy warfare in the First Division over his water-supply litigation, Harry was locked in his own room, playing with his new toy, the "Comic Opera," and I was daily "treading the boards" of the Parliament House, in weary heartbreaking imitation of his band of heroes. Being rather sick of my own society, I bethought me of visiting at the Langworthy's, one afternoon; besides, I had in my pocket a mysterious little note from Maria, requesting my presence "on a matter of supreme personal importance." As this urgent whip was double underlined, and as the suggestion jumped with my own fervent inclination, I presented myself in the music-room punctually at five o'clock.

An animated scene and a babel of voices greeted me. The piano had been moved to the floor, and ten or twelve pretty girls, trying to restrain their self-consciousness and suppress their giggling merriment, were on the stage, where Harry, fiddle in hand, was plunging about with characteristic impetuosity, allotting to them their different positions, and drilling them into the semblance of spontaneous movements.

Miss M'Skimming was clutching the "prompt-book,"

as she called it—for your amateur actor disdains the use of any language but the slang of the stage—in a nervous hand, Christine was at the piano, quiet and impervious as ever, while Maria, who silently waved a delighted hand to me as I entered, was leaning eagerly forward in her chair, watching the effect from the middle of the room. Somewhat to my surprise the only other person present was Charles Pennifeather, standing on the hearthrug in front of one of the fireplaces, and gazing on the scene with imperturbable calm.

"Enter the macer!" cried Maria gaily, as she welcomed me.

Harry looked round.

"All hail! precursor of the procession!" he exclaimed jovially.

I stared about me in astonishment.

"As yet he knows not his fate!" quoth Harry,

"Unconscious of his doom, the lambkin plays!"

but let us get this chorus right!"

Then, turning to the giggling occupants of the stage, he poured out a volley of more or less unintelligible directions about "left upper entrances," "centre back," and "down right," with all the rest of the technical whimsies that amateur stage managers do chiefly affect.

"Now then! all together!" he shouted, "and don't forget the 'snap'! the Scottish characteristic, as English musicians tell us; and, for goodness' sake, let us hear the words! Give us the chord, please, Min!"

"It's not Min at the piano, stoopid!" laughed Maria from her chair, "it's Christine!"

"Sorry!" said Harry, without turning round, "'twas a *lapsus memoriae*. Give us the chord, at any rate!"

Then the piano sounded; and the chorus of fisher-girls sang, in three-part harmony, to a characteristic strathspey-like melody, the words—

"We are maidens neat and clean,
Fishermen's daughters just nineteen,—
Coming to claim our right, we ween,
Of drying our nets on the putting-green!"

"Good!" cried Harry, tucking his fiddle under his chin. "Now strathspey steps, 'neat and clean,' *chassé* in and out, and come to a stop in a semicircle! Good! Now, Helen, forward!"

But Maria signalled protestingly from her place in the room to one of those on the stage.

"Please sing it for me, Amy," she cried, "I do want to hear how it goes!"

And so the understudy representative of "Helen" danced down the middle, as she sang—

"Impartial justice here we seek,—
Down with the driver, the brassy, and cleek!
We'll dance their foursomes in between,
And spread our nets on the putting-green."

"Keep it up!" cried Harry, fiddling for dear life. "Now, Alice!"

Once more the circle pirouetted and twisted, and "Alice" was left in the centre of the stage. With many airs and graces she went on—

"Encamped on golfers' velvet sward,
Their shouts of 'fore!' we'll disregard;
Our sylph-like forms shall soon be seen
All drying our nets on the putting-green!"

"Now, Chorus, *da capo!*" cried Harry again, dancing with excitement. And once more the "maidens neat and clean" sang their challenging lay together, and, after joining in the dance as before, sank back exhausted.

"Matilda!" shouted Harry, looking round reproachfully, "where is Matilda?"

From the stage all eyes were bent upon the unconscious Honoria M'Skimming, who was still holding on convulsively to her "prompt-book."

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, starting up, "do I come on now?"

Harry shook his fiddle and bow in the air in mock despair.

"Of course you do," he expostulated, "the stage waits! As the dance finishes you enter back, and come down centre. Now, once more! Dance again, please!"

But here there was rank mutiny. The "chorus" was out of breath, and peremptorily refused the encore.

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh! well!" he said, "'spile the play,' if you please, like the man who cut off Buckingham's head before the time. Consider the dance danced! Now, Matilda!"

So Honoria strode down the stage, the "contralto virago" required by custom, singing, with deadly earnestness, the verses:—

"Should the vandalising golfer
Impudent opposition offer—
(Unrepentant sinner!)
Our dread vengeance let him fear,
Day by day, throughout the year,
Fearsome fish at dinner!

Ne'er a sole, but brill and char,
Oysters in months without the 'r,'
These be his brief dooming!
All his salmon, loathly kelts,
And afar he'll smell the smelts,
Cooked for his consuming!

No more codfish, trout, nor plaice
Shall the breakfast table grace
Of the graceless fellow;
Such his fate who dares oppose
Maidens of the matchless hose,
And petticoats red and yellow!"

"Oh! rare Matilda!" cried Harry, when the song finished, amid great applause. "Thank Heaven! we are getting on! It is going almost too well. Now, we'll cut the conversation, and come to the finale of the scene! Trio—Helen, Alice, and Matilda, please! Arms akimbo, and just a *soupçon* of impudence! That's right. Now!"

Then the trio sang—

"We would sing 'caller-ow,' but we don't know how,
It is not quite in our line!
And in Largo Bay, we should like to say,
Of fishes we caught nine!
But we're up-to-date, and we beg to state,
For our fearless Female Band,
There nets shall be seen on that putting-green,
If there's justice in the land!"

And then the chorus finished in a burst—

“Fisher maidens, neat and clean,
All of us more or less nineteen,
Each one a bonnie and sonsy young quean,—
These nets shall be dried on that putting-green!”

“Bravo! bravo! bravo!” shouted Pennifeather, solemnly patting his hands softly together. “If that don’t bring down the house, call me a kailyarder!”

And now the bevy of exhausted beauty descended from the stage, eagerly discussing the play and their prospective costumes. Christine rang for tea, and the usual demoniac performance took place. The panel flew aside, and the servant appeared, and vanished as usual. By this time, however, Pennifeather seemed to be accustomed to the ritual, for he paid no attention, but stood idly contemplating a framed photograph in his hand, which he had taken from the shelf above the fireplace.

“And what did you mean by hailing me as ‘macer’?” I inquired of Maria.

“Because you are about to be one,” she replied, dimpling roguishly, “and a heaven-born macer you will make!”

“I!” I exclaimed, recoiling in horror.

“You are cast for the part of the bass-comic relief,” she answered blithely. “Harry says so, and what he says goes!”

“So that is the subject of supreme personal importance that caused my summons!” I retorted bitterly. “Had you made me a Judge, now, it might have been——”

“A proleptic vision!” Harry interrupted gaily, “but your solemn old visage will suit the part of the lugubrious macer to a nicety. That rock-like head——”

“Oh! do you remember what you said to dad,” Maria gurgled, “when you were a little boy?”

“Something stupendous, I have no doubt!” cried Harry. “Let us hear! Pray, silence for the observations of the future Lord President Montgomery, when aged nine!”

“Dad asked you how it was,” Maria went on, “that

your head looked as if cut out of solid rock, and you answered that you supposed your father must once have been a stone-mason."

Of course everybody laughed. Even Christine, who was paying little attention to what was passing, seemed to smile slightly.

"Clumsy, clumsy!" cried Pennifeather suddenly. He had somehow managed to drop the photograph, and was now on his knees picking up the fragments of glass, and endeavouring to replace the picture in its frame. "*I am sorry!*" he said, quite humbly.

In his agitation he was holding the photograph back to front, and seemed quite put out when his attention was called to the fact.

"There is no harm done, I assure you!" said Maria, taking it from him. "It is a portrait of my father, done three years ago, when he was last home."

"And is it still a good likeness?"

"Yes," said Maria hesitatingly. "Of course, he has grown older and graver since then. It seems a funny thing to say, but it appears to me to be much more like poor Uncle James, who was killed."

By this time Harry had carried off Christine to try over some alterations at the piano, whither she went with some reluctance, I thought, and Pennifeather seated himself by Maria and me.

"Did you know your uncle well?" he asked casually.

"Curiously enough, I saw him only once," Maria answered, "just two days before the terrible railway accident," and her eyes filled with tears. "I never even heard of him until shortly before. It seems that he did something dreadful at one time—but we all do dreadful things, don't we?—and so I wrote asking father to forgive him, and he did so, and they were reconciled. Wasn't it, too, splendid that it happened in time?"

"It was most—er—fortunate!" Pennifeather acquiesced.

"I was staying at Weymouth, when I heard that father had arrived in London; so I rushed up to town, went to the Savoy, found out the number of his sitting-room, opened the door, and there was father!"

"He would be pleased!"

"He was rather surprised at first," returned Maria, gurgling again at the recollection, "to have a great bouncing girl fling herself into his arms. 'Don't you know me, father?' I cried—'I'm Maria!'"

"And then he—er—tumbled to it?"

"Yes! He did laugh! and kissed me, and held me at arm's length, and looked at me, till I felt quite shy.

"'I must tell your Uncle James,' he said, going to the door, and then in came Uncle Jim. I could hardly believe my eyes, for Uncle Jim was just father over again: the same face, features, figure, everything!"

"'This is my daughter Maria,' cried father, as if it were the best joke in the world; 'allow me to present you, Maria, to my counterfeit presentment, your Uncle Jim.'

"Then they both laughed uproariously," she continued. "I could hear father laughing in his adjoining bedroom; and of course I laughed too, they seemed so merry over it, and Uncle Jim kissed me, just as father had done."

"'Well!' I said, 'if I had met you first, I should have thought that you were father!'"

"'It is a wise child——' said Uncle Jim, and we all laughed again. It was quite a joke amongst us; but of course I soon got to know the difference. I had to go back to a ball at Weymouth next day, and that very night father was maimed and Uncle Jim killed."

"Very distressing!" said Pennifeather: "but let us be thankful it was not the other way. To lose a relative whom you had only just found was tragic enough, but to have lost your father——"

"Yes, indeed!" replied Maria, with emotion; "and isn't it splendid that Harry escaped without a scratch!"

"Harry?" Pennifeather exclaimed; "I had no idea he was a passenger!"

"Yes," I said, looking round in warning, "he was there; but we never speak of it. He hates to recall the experience."

At that moment, Christine and Harry, along with most of the others, strolled across to join us at the fireplace.

"Who takes my name in vain?" asked Harry, who had caught fragments of the conversation.

"I was just explaining," I said, "that you dislike to be reminded of the dreadful night of the railway smash."

Harry's smile died away as he answered, almost brusquely—

"No one, I should think, who has ever gone through such a scene would seek to remember—though it is appallingly impossible to forget."

"He spent hours fighting the fires and rescuing and helping the wounded," said Maria proudly.

"Oh! do tell us, Mr Haviland," many of the girls exclaimed.

Harry shook his head deprecatingly.

"There is really nothing to tell," he said; "I simply remember a terrific convulsion, and then I awakened under a hedge in a field, sick and shaken, but with whole bones."

"You had been asleep, I suppose," Christine inquired in a low tone.

A question from Christine was so unusual that I confess I looked up with some surprise, to find her very pale, gazing with troubled and compassionate eyes in Harry's face.

"Dear me!" I thought, "Pennifeather is right! That girl might be almost pretty if she wore becoming clothes!"

"No, I was not asleep," Harry murmured in reply—"at least I think not. I lie awake trying to remember some pleasurable sensation that I had experienced just before the crash, but it always escapes me. Then I was in an alley-way. How I got there, or what I wanted, I know not. Suddenly the train swayed and shook. A blind in a first-class compartment flew up with a jerk, and there, for a moment, I had a vision of a man standing, holding in his arms another man. I caught his eye, and," continued Harry, with a far-away look, "it seemed to me that he was terrified! Probably he was only surprised, as I was. At the same moment I saw, in a flash, the picture of a woman leaning eagerly forward at

the carriage door, on the other side. Her profile was towards me, and her expression was one of concentrated fury, hate, fear, or some overmastering emotion. One thing I did notice was that she had an abundance of deep venetian-red hair. At that very instant the disaster happened, and I knew no more. I saw nothing of any of the occupants afterwards."

"How dreadful!" cried Maria, shuddering, and looking almost as pale as poor Christine.

"Curious!" said I, "but most probably accounted for by the fact that the train gave that preliminary lurch just before leaving the metals. The lurch, the blind flying open, the one man holding the other, and the woman making for the door, were all instantly simultaneous."

"There! That is explained with Robert's usual practical hard-headedness," cried Harry, rising and throwing off his momentary depression. "'Farewell! for I must leave you!' Next rehearsal for chorus and principals, here, the day after to-morrow!"

In an absent-minded way he picked up the photograph with the broken frame.

He looked at it long and earnestly, growing suddenly very red in the face and slowly paling again. Then he put it down quietly and joined the rest of us who were leaving.

Having occasion to return for one of my gloves that I had left behind, and fortunately finding the side door on the latch, I re-entered softly. Christine O'Mara was standing alone, facing the fireplace, with her back to the room and one foot on the brick fender. As I looked across, she stood erect, unconscious of my presence, and raising her clenched fist above her head, brought it down with cruel violence upon the stone mantelpiece.

"Bungler!" she whispered venomously, looking straight before her. "Bungling beast!"

Before she could turn round I seized my glove and fled.

"There is some spirit in the piano-pounder after all," I thought. "Now, I wonder which of them did so badly to-day as to merit the description of a bungling beast?"

CHAPTER V.

THE PHILOSOPHY AND PHILANTHROPY OF MR LANGWORTHY.

THERE was something wellnigh uncanny in the celerity with which the prophecy of Pennifeather was fulfilled. By Friday morning's post I received a letter in Christine O'Mara's neat and workmanlike handwriting—the handwriting that had evoked the commendation of Pennifeather when she transcribed the first verse of Haviland's improvisation—telling me that her Uncle Christopher would be glad if I could make it convenient to call in the course of that afternoon. As he had been consistently denied to all visitors, with the exception of the doctors and Mr Poole, and as I had never had any real intimacy with him on the brief occasions when he had previously paid flying visits to Edinburgh, I was naturally rather surprised at the summons; and the consoling assurance of Harry, that “the heavy father was about to ask my intentions in regard to his beloved daughter,” did not tend to put me further at ease in the matter. But having sent a brief note saying that I should be glad to wait upon Mr Langworthy at half-past four, I repaired to Queen Anne Square at that hour with a stout heart.

I look back on the interview, over the intervening years, in the light of the knowledge that I have since gained of that fascinating personality, Mr Christopher Langworthy, and cannot even now determine the true from the false. Was it all a carefully-prepared comedy, part of a cunning scheme and device calculated and intended only to mislead and deceive? Or was there not behind it some desire for solid comfort and assur-

ance that, come what might, a haven of refuge should be provided for one for whom that marvellous man ought at least to have retained some semblance of human affection?

Let me describe the scene as I remember it.

The front door was opened at my summons by Mr Langworthy's personal attendant, Saul Parker. He was the pattern and exemplar of quiet and respectable efficiency, a young, clean-shaven, gravely smiling manservant, always attentive, always deferential, but quite mindful of his personal dignity and conscious of his own self-respect.

To my somewhat nervous inquiry as to his master's state of health, he replied regretfully that he was afraid Mr Langworthy was not quite so well that afternoon; but, on my protesting against intruding under these circumstances, he assured me that Mr Langworthy was looking forward to my visit, and it would do him more harm than good were it now to be postponed.

Accordingly he ushered me up a broad flight of stairs, and, throwing open a door, accompanied me into the front room, where the patient passed his lonely days of suffering. This was the drawing-room of the house, a long lofty apartment; lighted by three great windows facing the square. To the back there was the usual recess, characteristic of such rooms in Edinburgh; but this had been partitioned off by a solid-looking wall to form a sleeping apartment. At a table facing one of the windows, and evidently deep in a voluminous correspondence, sat Christine O'Mara, who looked up and bowed slightly as I entered, immediately afterwards resuming her occupation. Maria, who had been standing on the hearthrug, leaning one hand on the mantelpiece and gazing pensively in the fire, turned swiftly at my approach, hastily passing a filmy handkerchief over her cheeks, and came forward smiling, but with dewy eyes.

"So you have really come, my dear good Robert!" she exclaimed, giving me both of her hands; "I am so thankful to see you."

"Is anything wrong?" I inquired; "your father is not worse, I hope?"

"I don't know, I don't know," she replied, her sweet mouth trembling; "the doctor assures us that there is no cause for alarm; but he is much changed within the last day or two, so restless and disturbed, as if there was something on his mind. I am sure he has had bad news of some kind, although he assures me that there is nothing."

"And why is he anxious to see me?" I asked.

Maria smiled, with a return of her usual mischievous playfulness.

"Perhaps he wants the solid comfort of a sedate and common-sense mind after his long confinement with only foolish and frivolous me!"

As she spoke, the door communicating with the back room was thrown open and the solicitous Parker appeared, wheeling a specially constructed couch, on which lay the invalid.

It was only a month or two afterwards that a full description of the appearance of that striking figure was freely circulated in the newspapers, after his untimely disappearance; but that is an old story now, and I shall therefore endeavour to describe the impression that he made upon me that day.

One glance at his face was sufficient to show from whom Maria had inherited her lustrous grey eyes and delicately-arched brows. His hair, too, must originally have been something of the same colour as hers, though now it was besprinkled with grey, especially above the ears, and one pure white lock curled upon his forehead. During his illness he had allowed a beard, deep auburn in colour, to grow, which he wore trimmed square and carefully brushed apart, almost revealing the cleft in a chin which I remembered firm, hard, and powerful. His strong capable hands, now pathetically white, lay on the coverlet; and he cast at me a sudden, swift, and penetrating glance as he was propelled into the room.

Having placed the couch between two of the windows, with the patient's head towards the wall, so that his face was shaded, while those conversing with him were left in a strong light, Parker deftly proceeded to manipu-

late some mechanical contrivance whereby the recumbent man was raised almost to a sitting position, while Maria tenderly arranged cushions and pillows about his head, whispering to him and kissing him as she did so.

Again he opened his great eyes, and turned them uncomprehendingly in my direction.

Then suddenly a light of recognition flashed across his face, and the sunniest of smiles broke through.

"Why, it's Robert!" he exclaimed in wonderfully resonant tones, rolling the letter "r" with that fascinating Borderland "burr" that I remembered so well—"old Robert Montgomery, most staid and sedate of youths, now grown a man! The same rock-like forehead, I observe. Do you still think your father must have been a stone-mason?"

I laughed as I gave him my hand.

"You have not forgotten, sir, I see."

"Fancy your remembering that old story, you darling!" laughed Maria delightedly; "why, we were speaking of it only yesterday in the music-room!"

In a moment his face clouded over and his expression changed to one almost of crafty suspicion.

"Why should I not remember?" he inquired fractiously. "Do you think I have lost my memory altogether just because sometimes things seem to me rather misty and far off?"

"Not at all, old gruff and grumpy!" said Maria soothingly; "I just meant that it was rather remarkable that both you and I should recall the same old story almost at the same time."

And when one comes to think of it, she was right. It was—rather remarkable.

Meanwhile Christine sat writing busily in the window, and Parker disappeared into the bedroom.

"A wonderful man that," said the invalid, following the servant with his eyes, "a pattern of unselfish devotion! Robs me less than any man I ever had, though that's not saying much; and his care of a helpless broken man shall be rewarded some day!" Here he raised his voice for an instant. Then, checking himself as quickly, he added, his expression changing to some-

thing like a sinister leer, "when I am gone, and all is over!"

"Don't talk foolishness!" Maria whispered, with a tender smile; "who thinks of sadness now? The doctors say——"

His eyes glowed with painful excitement.

"Doctors? Quacks, experimentalists, and empyricists! What do they know? What have they learned in all these generations of living, suffering, and dying humanity? Why, even Christine there," pointing at her almost savagely, "or, for the matter of that, Parker, might know secrets that would put the whole faculty of Edinburgh to shame!"

Christine looked round slowly and inquiringly.

"Does one spell 'anaconda' with one or two 'n's'?" she asked respectfully.

For some occult reason the question seemed to disturb him mightily. He gasped for breath and glared at her, at the same time drawing Maria unconsciously towards him, as if to shield her from evil.

"One 'n,' I think," I said, as Mr Langworthy gave no answer. "It's a snake of some kind, is it not?"

"Thanks," said Christine; "yes, I believe it is," and went on with her writing.

The scene was rather distressing to me, whatever it meant, and I turned to look out of the window as Parker came forward with some soothing drink.

"No! 'no more of that, an' you love me, Hal!'" I heard the invalid exclaim. "I will swallow no more of your doctor's decoctions! I'll weep, or fast, or fight, or tear myself, or eat a crocodile, but I will not have my rankness physicked. Throw physic to the dogs!"

"Why, sir," I exclaimed lightly, turning to him smiling, "these are brave quotations! You might have been a play-actor!"

A sort of convulsive shudder ran through his frame, and his jaw dropped as he rolled his great eyes in my direction. It seemed to me as if, at the same time, the impassive Parker was almost galvanised into a slight start of surprise, and Christine's busy hand remained for a moment poised in air.

"A play-actor!" the invalid repeated dreamily, and, to my surprise, all trace of the southern "burr" seemed gone for the time, "to strut and fret my life upon the stage, and then be seen no more?—the applause of listening senates to command, to split the ears of the groundlings, to hold their laughter or their tears in the hollow of one's hand, the sweep of one's arm, or a glance of the eye? Such a life may once have been my ambition; but no, Robert, no! Mark you, in respect that it is in the theatre it is a good life, but, in respect it is not in the world, it is naught!" and he lay back breathlessly.

I looked inquiringly at Maria, who was regarding her father with anxious and sorrowful eyes. She placed her finger on her lips, as if to motion to me that he was about to sleep—a sleep of exhaustion.

"Besides, Robert, my boy!" he suddenly went on in a surprisingly changed and cheerful voice, his face crinkling into a crooked smile, "there is no money in it! And what is life without money?" and he opened his eyes and looked humorously into mine.

"Money!" cried Maria, now relieved and gay again, "you and I, my dear, could live contented and happy, once you are well again, in a 'but and ben'!"

"Maria, you are a little heretic!" he answered fondly, "talking of things of which you have no knowledge, and, thank God! shall never have experience. Why! 'Look aroond ye!'" he exclaimed, relapsing once more into his dramatic mood. "'I have acquired a noble fortune, a princely fortune, and hoo do ye think I got it, sir?'"

"'Doubtless, sir, by your abilities!'" I replied, capping the quotation.

"'Doubtless, sir, you are a blockhead!'" he returned merrily. "Aye, Robert, I am glad to see that you are familiar with the classical drama. There is something besides law behind that Ailsa Craig head of yours! Money, let me tell you, miss," he continued, turning his head towards his daughter, "is the 'Open Sesame' to all that makes life worth living; and, at the same time," he added gloomily, "it is the curse of a sick man's existence. Suppose, Robert"—and his face assumed

that crafty and secretive look once more—"suppose that I were to make a will now, could I do what I please with all my worldly goods? Could I tie them up so that Maria should never touch a penny? Could I leave it all to the heathen, or the dogs, or to Parker there, which would be the same thing? Eh? What do you say?"

Remembering the words of Pennifeather, I was startled by this eager question, propounded so earnestly.

"Could I cut out Maria, and cast her penniless upon the world?" he repeated, at the same time holding to his heart the little hand that he had clasped in both of his own.

She looked so shyly ashamed for him, and yet so proud of him too, as she bent over him, turning at the same time to me with a glance of half-comical, half-pleading distress.

"You cannot do anything of the kind," I answered firmly, "even if you desired to be so unnatural and ungrateful, which I know you do not. Maria's share of your personal property cannot be affected."

"But," he responded rather wildly, "if I were to make a will, if, without meaning it, I should make a will, if they—if circumstances—should compel me—ah!"

He sank back exhausted, and once more the indefatigable Parker approached with a restorative, only to be impatiently waved away. I thought I saw the man's lips move as he stood beside his master, but, whether that be so or not, Mr Langworthy certainly became from that moment quieter and less incoherent.

"Say it again, Robert," he resumed more slowly. "If I were to die to-morrow, leaving everything I possess to you, would that be valid?"

"In that very unlikely event," I answered, smiling, "the will itself would be quite valid——"

Here he gazed at me with apprehension.

"But," I went on, "Maria's claim to one-half of your personal estate would need to be satisfied before I could touch a penny."

He lay back with a sigh of relief.

"Now, dearest and best," said Maria blithely, "after

this extremely personal and uninteresting discussion, I hope you are satisfied! Now you know for certain that I may be as unloving and disagreeable as I please, there can be no punishment for me."

He looked up, smiling as mischievously as his daughter. "I could give it all away!" he chuckled.

"That remedy is certainly open," I assented.

"But why should I trouble?" he ejaculated in sudden wrath; "it is all being taken from me! Robbed and swindled, swindled and robbed at every turn! And here I lie, helpless and inert, a living corpse!"

"Hush, dearest, hush!" Maria whispered, in distress.

"It is true, true!" he exclaimed, with an angry fire in his eye and something like tears in his voice. "Ten thousand pounds gone in a crash! O Lord! Lord! If only the rogues and thieves of this world—these easy-come easy-go, light-fingered gentry—would try to realise the pains and labour, the sweat of mind and brain, that it costs an honest man to earn ten thousand pounds!"

I looked a question at Maria, but she only shook her head, as if in ignorance of his meaning.

"James Langworthy, my dear dead brother James," he went on pensively, "whom I loved as myself"—here the papers on Christine's desk rustled slightly—"whom I loved as myself," he repeated firmly, after a quick glance in her direction. "In our boyhood's days

'We still have slept together,
Rose at an instant, learned, played, ate together,
And, wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,
Still we went coupled, and inseparable.'

He fell from the straight path, it is true, but he never played false with me. Two days before his death, I paid into Rigby's Bank ten thousand pounds to set him on his legs. He died in my arms. His dead body protected me from danger and saved my life,—and now that ten thousand pounds has been stolen, filched away by some unscrupulous ruffian, I am all the poorer and no benefit to him."

"Is this true?" I whispered to Maria.

But his ears were sharp, whatever other faculties may have been blunted.

"True, young man?" he exclaimed. "Do you think I would lie about money on my death-bed?" and he eyed me with indignation. "But I have told our respectable Poole. Let us see what he can make of it. Alas! poor James!" he repeated sorrowfully, "to think that we met, only to part again! How useful he would have been to me! He was to have sailed for—er—the East—almost this very day. But," he cried, savagely pounding his pillows, "the railway companies shall pay for it! I am poorer in pocket and in love by the death of my only brother,—the railway companies shall pay!"

Again there crept over me an eerie recollection of Pennifeather's words when we parted at the club.

"I am afraid," I said gently, "that you have no claim against the company on account of your brother's death."

"No claim?" he almost shouted.

"Not as a brother," I answered; "had he left wife or child now——"

"James was a—a bachelor," he retorted gloomily, while Christine's papers rustled again.

"But I have a claim on account of my own injuries and suffering!" he cried, suddenly and explosively.

"Certainly," I answered, somewhat surprised at the suggestion, "if, in your position, you care to press it."

"If I care to press it!" he retorted with indignant scorn, "and why, pray, should I show leniency to these man-slayers? Is my body to be battered and broken, am I to lie here a maimed and miserable wretch, transformed in a moment from a living, enjoying human being to a useless, pain-racked hulk, for whom, if love survives at all, it lives only as filial piety and pity, or condescending compassion? Is all this to happen to me, and am I to say, with bated breath and whispering humbleness, 'Kismet! It is the will of Allah, it is the pleasure of a railway company?' Not on your life, my dear young sympathetic friend, not on your life!"

"Dearest of dears!" cried Maria, pressing her fair young cheek against his furious face, "you know you do not mean what you say. Love survives, not as filial piety or pity, but tender, enduring, and steadfast as ever."

The invalid gently disengaged himself from her embrace, and responded in calmer tones—

“My love, you must make allowances for the vibrating and twittering nerves of an exasperated, old, twisted, and tortured man. The smooth-tongued complacency”—and here he glared on me malevolently once more—“that would affect to think that a rich man’s sufferings are not worthy of being assuaged by the only solvent common to humanity may have induced me to express myself more strongly than my calmer moments would approve.”

I hastened to disclaim contritely any such malign suggestion; but he would have none of it.

“I am a wreck!” he cried, “a helpless, useless, encumbering wreck. I have lost my health, my ease, comfort, and enjoyment of life! Is all that to go for nothing? I am told that the loss of my brother is not to be compensated, although his continued existence meant more to me than the lives of fifty. By their own greed, incompetence, folly, and recklessness, these dividend-hunters have made me what you see. I am not a vindictive man; but the railway company shall suffer in the only way they can be made to suffer! They shall pay for it—pay for it—pay for it!”

And he beat his clenched fists vehemently on the smooth white coverlet.

His impotent wrath was painful to witness. Maria seemed overwhelmed by the outburst; and, after sitting with drooping head beside his couch for a moment or two, she rose quietly and stole over to the fireplace, while he lay watching her movements with moody and brooding eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PATERNAL SOLICITUDE OF MR LANGWORTHY.

THE strained silence was broken by Christine O'Mara, who rose from the table at which she had been writing, carrying a large bundle of letters and cheques for Mr Langworthy's signature, which she placed on a sort of invalid table-desk, screwed on the couch by the servant Parker.

He seized the fountain-pen that was handed to him, talking once more with a vindictive scowl, while he scanned the correspondence and signed his name.

"There are some persons, my dear Maria," he said, as he picked up a letter and glanced through its contents, "good, virtuous, Christian people, who seem to deny to any man the privilege of standing up for his own rights. 'Concentrate on your duties,' they say, 'and your rights will take care of themselves!' 'That! for my duties,' say I. Give me my inalienable rights! That's all I want!"

Maria returned to his side, sunny and smiling once more.

"You know that you are only pretending," she laughed. "You are the most charitable old humbug in the world, always thinking of the wants of others. Why, what are you doing at the present moment?"

"I am answering the call of the leeches at the vein, ever crying 'Give! give!'" he answered, signing rapidly the various letters and cheques, and ticking them off on a list before him. "I am asserting the proud privilege of wealth to condescend, the selfishness of the rich to gratify himself by patronising the poor. I tingle

with the fervour of superiority, and I am diminishing the inheritance of my child by titillating my palate with the pleasurable flavour of gaining a cheap popularity at her ultimate expense."

He frowned majestically upon Maria. Then, drawing her towards him with great tenderness, he whispered, "I shall never forgive you if you believe a word of it!"

"Then you must forgive me at once," she said, "because I don't."

"Hullo! what's this?" he inquired abruptly of Christine O'Mara, who was standing patiently at his other side: "a cheque not filled up, and an unfinished letter, 'Dear Madam,—I regret to hear of your misfortune, and——'"

"I have no memorandum of your instructions in regard to that letter," said Christine.

"What sort of letter?" he inquired shortly; "a beggar, a bother, or a blether? These, my dear Robert," he explained to me, "are the three classifications of my daily correspondence."

"It seems to me to partake of all these characteristics," Christine answered, in her usual cold and colourless voice.

"Ah!" said Mr Langworthy, "read it to me, or, better still, let Maria read it. She will put her heart into it. With all respect to you, Christine, you recite the most soul-stirring appeal as if it were an Act of Parliament!"

Without a word Christine handed to Maria a single sheet of crumpled, disreputable-looking notepaper, from which she forthwith proceeded to read aloud:—

"Dear Sir,—Please forgive a perfect stranger for venturing to address you."

"The invariable apostrophe!" the invalid soliloquised. "It's a beggar."

"But I have heard of your sympathetic kindness to distressed members of the theatrical profession."

"That's a blether!" he monotoned.

"And I trust that you will take an interest in, and believe, my true story."

'And that's a bother!' he exclaimed, closing his eyes in resignation.

"Some years ago," Maria continued to read, "'I was

on the road with a travelling company, along with my adopted sister. The manager was a man who had made a mark in London, but had somehow gone under a cloud. In the company there was a man unknown to any of us, said to have come from Australia, who was our bright particular star. He had great fascination and personal magnetism, but was as unprincipled as he was clever. Before the tour was half completed, he had succeeded in wheedling out of every female in the company all that they possessed, for some wild-cat investment that was to make all our fortunes. My own little savings went with the rest. He had also won my heart; but that is a trifle, as the black-hearted villain had secretly made love to us all. Although we were doing good business, salaries fell into arrear; and at last, after a splendid week in Manchester, when we arrived for treasury at the theatre on the Saturday morning, the manager was gone, my sister was not to be found, and the fascinating stranger had disappeared. From that moment nothing has been heard of any of them, and, as my sister was left in my care, I am quite broken-hearted. I am ill. Any little voice I had has left me. Prospect, savings, sister—of all I am bereft, and only the workhouse awaits me. If, with your wealth and influence, you could help me to trace the fugitives and recover my own, I could live in comfort for the few years left to me.” And Maria’s voice faltered as she concluded.

“Well,” said Mr Langworthy, opening his great eyes to look towards Christine, “what do you think of it? Not quite in the usual vein? Eh? What?”

Christine seemed to have grown curiously white about the lips, but she answered steadily—

“I think it only the old story in a new form, sir.”

“Tut! tut!” he replied testily; “to my mind there is a genuine enough ring of sincerity in it, neither whining nor threatening. Parker!” he called to his servant, who was hovering near,—“I don’t for one moment believe your name is Parker; but that does not matter—from your point of view, what do you think of that letter? What would you do with it?”

"I should put it in the back of the fire," said Parker promptly, without moving a muscle.

"Sceptics we are, or sceptics we become," Mr Langworthy reflected, with a half-vexed laugh followed by a distinct sigh. "Well, here goes!" and he made to tear the cheque and the unfinished reply.

"Oh, dad!" Maria implored, staying his hand. "Surely you do not mean to disregard the heart-breaking appeal of that poor woman, destitute and alone, ill, starving, and thrown on the world by a despicable villain! Think of her loneliness and desertion! What if such a fate were to overtake one you love? For all we can tell, the writer may be some one we have seen and known, some one whom you yourself have met in your wanderings! What if, one day, I were reduced to making such a request, only to find, in place of pity and sympathy, a heart of stone?"

She had thrown herself on her knees beside the couch, looking earnestly and beseechingly in his troubled face.

"Some one I have met in my wanderings," he muttered strangely. "Swindled and deserted, poor, friendless, and alone! Maria, my dear, you must not take these things so much to heart, you must not move me thus."

Then, resuming his more natural manner, he cried almost gaily—

"There is Robert, steady, sober, sedate, careful Robert! Ask him! He will tell you that letters such as these are daily burned by the score, by every man of position and wealth, the fair game of the harpies."

Maria raised her shining eyes and tear-stained face to me, murmuring, "'Inasmuch as ye did it'——"

"No, no, no!" cried her father, with vehemence; "response to blackmail is not Christian charity; it is cowardice! But this is a democratic country," he continued, changing his tone once more: "let us put it to the vote—by ballot, yes, by ballot! Bring me a bowl, or a glass, or a hat, or something, and five slips of paper. Each of us shall mark down the sum that he

or she considers appropriate for the relief of the lady's distress. Money, my dear Robert, as you lawyers say, is the universal solvent, the only panacea for all the ills that flesh is heir to. The result of our vote to-day will be no more surprising or less sensible than the verdict of any jury or constituency!"

Here he lay back chuckling, after requesting Christine to fetch a certain vase from a room at the end of the corridor.

At his request Maria handed him the letter, that he might read it once again, and then turned to Christine's desk, searching for paper.

"Where are my spectacles?" Mr Langworthy exclaimed irritably. "I cannot see a word. Parker, I think I must have left them in the bedroom. Go and see, like a good fellow!"

For a moment I thought the servant was about to refuse. He seemed to hesitate, much to my surprise; but after a swift glance in the direction of Maria, whose back was turned, he withdrew quickly into the adjoining room, leaving the door wide open.

Then followed the most astonishing incident of the day. Still conversing easily and naturally, Mr Langworthy, after one keen glance around, suddenly plunged his hand into his bosom, and as suddenly withdrew it again. Looking with intent and imploring directness straight into my eyes, he secretly held out to me from under the coverlet a stout packet enclosed in an envelope, which he hastily motioned to me to conceal instantly in my pocket.

Considerably mystified, I did as I was directed just as Parker and Christine returned to the room. I thought they both glanced rather sharply in my direction, but flatter myself that I kept my countenance with tolerable composure. Whatever that packet contained, it was plainly obvious that Mr Langworthy was anxious that none should know of its being in my keeping.

"I found my spectacles under my pillow after all," he said casually; "sorry to have troubled you, Parker. Now let us all play this round game!"

Taking, each of us, one of the slips prepared by Maria, we wrote down the sum that we thought appropriate, and tossed the result into the vase.

There were two votes for zero, one for £50, one for £100, and one for £500.

Mr Langworthy grinned at me.

"Robert, you are an extravagant dog! There is nothing more easy than for cocks to make free with other people's corn!"

"How do you know that I am not the £500 culprit?" asked Maria coaxingly.

"Because you are a woman, my dear," he answered drily, "and therefore unable to take the broad view, one way or the other."

Parker and Christine looked on, both impassive as ever.

"Let me see," said the invalid—"£650 divided by three——"

"It should be divided by five," Christine interrupted incisively.

He looked at her for a moment with a frowning brow; then, laughing wildly, he shouted—

"Most careful and calculating of secretaries, your will is law! For once we shall not divide by three!"

It was long before I understood the cryptic significance of that phrase.

"One hundred and thirty pounds be it," he said resignedly, as he filled in the cheque. "But, Robert, you *are* a spendthrift!" and he winked at me behind his left hand, with which he was at the moment shading his eyes.

For I had put down the figure "£50" on my ballot paper.

"I am afraid," I said, rising, that I am making you overdo it. It is time for me to be going."

I was really burning with impatience to discover the contents of the mysterious parcel.

"Straight home, sir!" he responded, once more glancing meaningly at me from behind his hand; "do not loiter on the way, creeping like snail unwillingly to—Palace Street! Good-bye just now! You have cheered

me up wonderfully by your witty, sprightly, animated, and diversified conversation, my boy."

"Don't mind his attempted chaff, Robert!" cried Maria indignantly; "he may pretend as he pleases, but he is a different man since you came."

"He has taken a load from my mind," the other returned in mock heroic tones, and casting his eyes piously to the ceiling. "His eloquence has been uplifting and consoling. Now I know that an unhappy millionaire should submit to be battered to death by a rascally railway company without calling them to account, that I have no recourse, although they have slaughtered my brother, lacerated my feelings, and deprived me of potential millions more, and that it is impossible by the law of Scotland for a Scotsman to deprive his disobedient daughter of her legal rights."

He said all this in an almost unnecessarily loud tone of voice, ticking off the heads one by one.

Then, grasping my hand affectionately in his cool and capable fingers, he added—

"There! go, my boy! Your visit has been a complete success; my blessing with you!"

Bowing farewell to Christine, I hurried downstairs with Maria, who took me to the front door. All her depression past, she seemed now radiant with delight, seizing both of my hands and kissing them impulsively, with the naïve innocence of a child. Then, dropping her fascinating little "bob" curtsy, she said in her pretty, half-shy, all-earnest voice—

"Good-bye, dear Robert. I can never thank you enough!"

I walked away in the seventh heaven.

Then the door was opened again, and a little breathless voice exclaimed—

"My dear love to Hamish!"

After that I marched off at a steady and sedate pace, befitting my years and dignity.

No sooner was I in my own room with the door securely locked and the blinds drawn—I don't know why—than I withdrew the package from my pocket and opened it with impatient fingers. To my utter

amazement and consternation there fell on the table, first a letter, and then a roll of Bank of England notes to the value of nine thousand five hundred pounds!

There was no doubt about it. I counted the notes over twice before stuffing them away in the back of a drawer, which I locked, and put the key in my pocket.

Then I read the letter.

"Receive herewith," it ran, "the surprise of a lifetime, £9500, in good bank notes. It should have been £10,000, but I was robbed of £500 by an unconscionable villain. This is not eccentric tomfoolery, but deadly earnest. At any moment, Maria may be cast on the world without provision: I dare not explain why. You are an honest man, I think; and I must trust some one. Whatever happens, this money is the property of Maria, and that independently of me. It is her very own. You are to invest it, and, if need be, use it for her benefit. If and when she marries, a man as honest as you I humbly pray, it is to be put in trust for her, with liberty to encroach on capital if need be. Even if I should demand its return, you are not to accede to the request, however made. Invest in safe security, but pay Maria nothing until necessity arises. Above all, secrecy and silence! I trust your honour to tell no one, under any circumstances, so long as I am alive and available—neither Poole, nor your dearest friends. Above all, not a word to Maria, nor to me—not even if we are alone.

"As you value your life, invest the money at once, and burn this letter now."

The last four words were doubly underlined.

Three times did I read this astounding communication. It seemed the raving of insanity; but the recollection of his commanding look and purpose-like demeanour when he thrust the packet upon me was enough to dispel that idea at once. I must take no advice, nor consult even with my dearest friends. Here was mystery indeed! and mysteries are not in my line.

One thing certain was, that the money must not lie in my hands an unnecessary moment. It was long past banking hours, but I had to take my chance of that, and so I sallied forth. I do not know what Mr Blanemyre,

the worthy Secretary of the Northshore Bank, thought when I called on him mysteriously that afternoon, and luckily found him still in his private room; whether it seemed to him that I must be a successful burglar or a fortunate gambler—and, truth to tell, I did not much care. But a weight was lifted from my mind when I succeeded in getting him to take charge of the parcel for the night, securely sealed in the bank safe; and I came away with a light heart in my breast, and a safe-custody receipt in my pocket.

CHAPTER VII.

MR POOLE'S DILEMMA.

MR EDGAR POOLE was a typical Writer to the Signet of last generation—tall and florid, with a large nose, a beaming moist eye, and carefully tended side-whiskers, bushy and—the malicious said—curled artificially every morning. He had a habit of carrying his head slightly on one side, as though he were lending a sympathetic ear to the plaintive tale of a litigant in an imaginary client's chair beside him. Impecunious Highland lairds trembled at his nod, as they thought of falling rent-rolls and increasing interests to be paid on existing encumbrances, and wondered where money was to be got to conserve their diminishing estates and launch their increasing families in life. He breathed an atmosphere of old-fashioned professional respectability, was the confidential adviser, at once of tight-fisted disinheriting fathers and obstinate and extravagant eldest sons, demanding their utmost farthing before consenting to the disentail of the family acres; but in the modern field of commercial mercantile law he was rather helpless. He understood little about it, and he cared less. He was, it is true, law-agent or solicitor for the great Midlothian Banking Co., Ltd., but all that work he left to a staff of capable subordinates. In short, he was one of the last remaining examples of the fine old crusted, trusted family solicitor, depositary of the secret histories of a multitude of aristocratic clients, stern in duty, sound in advice within his own sphere, and devoted to the business of the estates under his management.

In the Parliament House, however, his appearances were infrequent, and the Courts he never entered. Now and

then, he might be seen emerging from the private room of the Dean of Faculty in the library adjoining, or entering the chambers of the Lord Advocate in the Crown Office; but to the habitués of the Hall itself, and the laughing groups around the fireplace, he was a personage unknown.

It was therefore with no little surprise that I heard myself greeted by Mr Poole in a friendly voice on the Saturday morning—the day after my interview with Mr Langworthy—and, to the astonishment of the juniors looking on in the Hall, was walked off, with his arm thrust affectionately through my own.

“My dear Robert,” he said, inclining his ear to me, in characteristic fashion—“you will excuse my calling you ‘Robert’? I knew your father well, and you and I have always been friends.”

I could not help thinking that his friendship had never yet materialised, even to the extent of sending me a Petition to “sign and move”; but I agreed heartily—

“Certainly! Call me what you please!”

After a vague reference to Mr Langworthy’s claim against the railway company, “the papers in which, my dear Robert, shall be sent to you should an action be necessary,” Mr Poole became strangely silent for a time, marching me up and down that well-remembered floor with heavy and thoughtful strides.

At last he began, in rather a surprised and querulous, not to say aggrieved, tone of voice—

“You will hardly credit it, but the fact is I am——” here he groped about for the appropriate adjective. Then it came out with a burst, “Worried—that’s the word, Worried,” and he gave my arm a patronising squeeze, as he closed his owl-like eyes and opened them again in a kind of astonished stare.

I murmured that I was sorry to hear it.

“The fact is,” he repeated, “that I am—Worried about our dear little friend Maria.”

I pricked up my ears at this; and, as we seated ourselves on one of the benches at the end of the Hall, waited patiently for more.

"You saw Langworthy yourself yesterday," he went on, after a pause; "tell me, how did he strike you?"

I said that he struck me as exceedingly hale and hearty after his trying experience and long confinement.

Mr Poole drew his brows together, and stroked his whisker.

"Quite—er—*compos mentis*?" he inquired, with a shrewd side-look.

"So far as I could judge," I replied guardedly, determined not to be drawn.

"He told you of that ten thousand pounds that he lent to his brother, I understand?" the solicitor continued.

"Which mysteriously disappeared the next day? Yes!"

"Well! What did you think of that?" he asked, doing the owl-trick at me again.

I said I thought it a very strange story.

"Strange!" he echoed. "Yes, more than strange. Here we have this brother James borrowing, on an I.O.U., this large sum from my client. He received the money all right, because Mr Langworthy wrote me on the matter, and I provided it. Now, what did James Langworthy want that money for? If to pay a debt, he might have done so direct without passing it through a bank for a single day, and he would surely have left some record of the transaction! The succession of events," said Mr Poole, crossing his legs and holding me with his moist eye and oscillating forefinger, "is this. James obtains a draft for £10,000 from my client in London on a certain day. He opens an account at Rigby's Bank, to the credit of which he pays in the money, leaves a specimen of his signature, and obtains a cheque-book. On the day following the first cheque in that book is presented at Rigby's, drawn by James Langworthy in his own favour, for the entire £10,000, a bearer cheque, but endorsed by James himself *ob majorem cautelam*, together with an autograph letter asking the bank to pay the sum to the bearer. The bank compares the signatures, gets the young man

who presents the cheque also to endorse it, and pays him the money. Then the young man and the ten thousand pounds disappear and are never heard of again."

Here the forefinger came to rest in mid-air, as he gazed upon me in impressive silence.

"Well," I said at last, "that seems a very ordinary and regular proceeding after all. If the bank acted in good faith, of course they are protected."

"Even in the case of forgery?" he asked.

"You mean forgery of the name of the drawer?" I said. "Ah! if Mr Langworthy—who is, I understand, his brother's executor—can prove that the signature of James Langworthy is a forgery he might make it unpleasant for the bank, I admit."

"Langworthy says that James's signature is a forgery," he answered.

"How does he know that?"

"That's what I cannot understand," retorted the Writer to the Signet with great irritation, "but he is absolutely positive about the matter. As you have said, my client was confirmed executor to his brother—or took out probate, as they say in England. So far as we can ascertain, James left no estate whatever but this ten thousand pounds, and when we make inquiry at the bank—it is gone!"

"How did Mr Langworthy know that James had paid the sum into Rigby's?" I inquired.

Mr Poole waved the forefinger in a non-committal manner.

"James had told him so, I presume," was his answer.

"But did Mr Langworthy take no security for his loan?" I asked.

"What security could a penniless man give?" the solicitor returned, very seriously. "I understand that it was not so much a loan as a fraternal gift to celebrate the reconciliation."

"The simple solution seems to be," I began, "that James, being put in funds, must have paid the money to a creditor of his own——"

"Who ever heard," he broke in with some heat, "of

a pauper owing £10,000 to one creditor and, so far as we can ascertain, not a single penny to any one else in the world?"

"It is most extraordinary," I agreed, "but it appears to me, even although a family affair, most unbusiness-like in a man of Mr Langworthy's experience. Surely, if he could get no security, he might have insured his brother's life. He had an insurable interest to the extent of his loan."

"Ha! to be sure!" remarked Mr Poole, stroking his whisker once more, "that might have been done, certainly."

I am quite convinced, by the way, that he had never thought of it before.

"But, I presume, it did not occur to him?" I continued.

"My client's memory," said Mr Poole in some confusion, "is much impaired, as the result of the accident; and, most unfortunately, the despatch-box that he carried, containing papers and securities, perished in the flames when the woodwork took fire."

"Was nothing recovered?" I asked.

"A handbag containing only a few splinters of wood was found near Mr Langworthy," he answered; "but he denies all knowledge of it, and obviously it was not part of his personal belongings."

"I suppose," I said thoughtfully, "that if Mr Langworthy did take out a policy of insurance over his brother's life, it would be in the despatch-box."

"If he did," returned the solicitor, "but he has never suggested that such a thing was done. But," he went on, blinking at me again with even more than his usual solemnity, "a much more serious state of affairs has arisen here in Edinburgh, which is causing me great anxiety."

"Indeed!" I said.

"You know, of course, that we sold the place in Inverdeeshire—at a considerable sacrifice, but my client insisted. Of the purchase price, ten thousand pounds was paid, by his directions, into the head office of the Midlothian Banking Company."

Here he paused for a moment to draw a long breath.

Then, tapping me on the knee with that forefinger, he continued, solemnly and impressively—

“That ten thousand pounds has gone—fled, vanished, and disappeared like the other!” And he positively goggled at me as he uttered the words.

Of course it was very shocking; but it was also distinctly funny, and I nearly disgraced myself for ever by bursting into a laugh.

Quickly converting it into a troublesome cough, however, I ejaculated feebly—

“God bless my soul! You don’t say so! How did that happen?”

“My client seems to be a favourite target for all the professional swindlers in the world,” the worthy solicitor answered with growing indignation. “The scheme, I must admit, was somewhat ingenious. A man of the name of Earnest Willis opens an account at the Northshore Bank in George Street, and deposits some £500 there. He professes to be engaged in a branch business for a Liverpool firm of merchants, and has an office in Leith, but it is now whispered that the principal business done there consisted in betting by correspondence. After some ordinary and comparatively small transactions, he suddenly begins to deal in large sums, paying into his account cheques for considerable amounts, which are all duly honoured, and paying out equally large cheques. One day, when his balance stands very low, he presents at the Northshore a crossed cheque in his own favour, drawn on the Midlothian Bank by Mr Langworthy for £10,000. The Northshore Bank, fortunately for them, send an inquiry to the Midlothian, stating the number of the cheque, and, as that corresponds with one of the numbers in Mr Langworthy’s current cheque-book, they reply that all is in order. Accordingly Mr Willis endorses the cheque and receives payment from the Northshore, who in turn collect the money from the Midlothian. It now turns out that the signature of Mr Langworthy is a forgery, the engraved number on the cheque having been skilfully altered.”

“This raises an interesting problem,” I cried. “Well? Pray go on!”

"The Northshore," Mr Poole continued, his forefinger well in evidence again, "refuses to refund to the Midlothian, on the plea that they could not be expected to know Mr Langworthy's signature, and did know that of their own customer; and Mr Langworthy desires to hold the Midlothian liable for paying away his money on a cheque where the drawer's name was forged."

"In the meantime, I suppose," I said, still somewhat amused, "Mr Earnest Willis, like the ten thousand, has also gone—fled, vanished, and disappeared!"

"He has," the solicitor admitted sorrowfully: "so have his business, his office in Leith, and all the rest of it! It is excessively awkward for me in my dual position," he added fractiously: "either the bank or Mr Langworthy—both my clients—must lose that £10,000."

"I back Mr Langworthy," I said lightly. "Willis's fraud did not benefit him—quite the reverse—and the Midlothian are in the uncomfortable position of having parted with their customer's money without his authority."

"It is an extremely awkward position," Mr Poole reiterated, "in whichever way you look at it."

"But has nothing been done to trace the man Willis?" I asked.

"A clever scoundrel, and an impudent dog, whoever he may be!" he answered in tones of exasperated displeasure, "and he must be intimately acquainted with the doings at Queen Anne Square."

"How otherwise would he know the proper number to have engraved on the cheque?" I agreed.

"Precisely! Now, no one has access to Mr Langworthy's room—with the exception of that stupid young woman whom he supports for charity—Miss Macnamara, or some such name—but his servant Parker, and Maria."

"We may rule out Maria!" I exclaimed, laughing.

"In that I agree," he said warmly. "Dear girl! She has grown up under my own eye, and is to-day like a daughter! But I must confess that she fails to appreciate the gravity of the situation."

"In what way?" I asked.

"She treats the matter," he remarked portentously, "with an almost unbecoming levity. She has no notion of the value of—Money!"—he pronounced the word as reverently as if he were in church. "I took the forged cheque to show her father this morning, and she seemed to look at the thing, if I may say so, from the artistic, not the practical side. We all examined the signature with a critical eye, and then she laughed in her characteristic way—you know?" and for the first time during the interview he actually smiled.

"I know," I agreed feelingly.

"And said, 'I don't think much of that! Why, even I could be a better forger;' and she seized a pen and dashed off an exact facsimile of her father's sign-manual. He was much amused; but I was not. 'That is a most dangerous accomplishment!' I said; but she only answered by a little contrite smile.

"Then what of the servant?" I inquired.

"A most respectful and respectable fellow, or I am no judge!" said Mr Poole again warmly. "He has a complete *alibi*, for he was in constant attendance on his master all the time. No, no, there must be some man who has succeeded in worming himself in somehow; and what I want to ask you about especially is in regard to the kind of people you meet in that music-room, where all the gaiety goes on. How about this young Englishman, Pennifeather? I may say that, rightly or wrongly, my client seems suspicious about him."

The question came upon me with something of a shock, for who, after all, *was* Pennifather?

"He seems a particularly pleasant sort of fellow," I replied tentatively.

"Yes; but what is he? and what is he doing here?"

"He—he is living at the club," I responded lamely.

"Of which he is a temporary member, I understand," said Mr Poole. "But what is his business? Has he any business? What does he want in Edinburgh?"

"He is a barrister, I understand," I replied.

"His name does not appear as a member of any of the Inns of Court," answered Mr Poole, "for I have been making inquiries. In my opinion," he continued, once

more performing the owl-trick to give emphasis to his words, "he is nothing but an adventurer, a fortune-hunter—if not worse. I know that it is not a nice job that I ask you to undertake, my dear Robert, but even my client's enormous fortune cannot afford to have £10,000-slices cut out of it at random. I shall take it very kind if you will keep an eye on Pennifeather. I saw you both in the smoking-room of the club the other night. If he was endeavouring to 'pump' you then, as I rather suspect he was, oblige me by trying to reverse the process in future."

And with a cordial handshake and many good wishes for my advancement in the profession—he seemed to forget the number of years I had already been offering my wares for hire—the Writer to the Signet arose, and carried his tall figure, his large nose, his beaming eye, his bushy whiskers and his side-cocked head, together with his burden of responsibilities, out of the Hall.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR PENNIFEATHER OPENS AN ACCOUNT.

To say that I was startled by Mr Poole's hints and innuendoes regarding Pennifeather is to be short of the mark. After all, who was Mr Pennifeather, and what did he want in our city? Further, what was the attraction that led him to frequent Queen Anne Square? The presence of Maria there might account for a good deal—and a good deal too much, if Mr Poole were anything like right when he described him as a fortune-hunter; but he had never appeared to devote himself to her, or even to pay her marked attention. As I wandered alone, up and down the Hall, thinking the matter over, various little incidents occurred to my mind—his obvious pose as an Englishman professing to admire and live up to our rather provincial standards, his curiosity in regard to Mr Langworthy's photograph, even his interest in the structure of the music-room, began to strike me as something sinister and suspicious; but, above all, the recollection of our conversation in the club about the very subjects that were now beginning to have personal reference to the Langworthy family—actions of damages for injury, and the right of a brother to institute such proceedings, insurable interests, *legitim*, and his harping on the law about forged cheques—all these caused me to ponder with misgiving and disquiet upon Mr Poole's cryptic communication.

While tramping backwards and forwards on the floor of the Parliament House, engrossed in these uncomfortable speculations, I chanced to glance towards the great

swing doors, and, somewhat to my chagrin, there was the subject of my meditations, Charles Pennifeather himself, stick in hand and glass in eye, advancing indolently in my direction.

"Mornin'!" he said, in his usual staccato. "Doin' the inevitable constitutional, I see?"

I assented, ruefully enough.

" 'Like beasts in a menagerie
We pace the boarded floor,' "

he quoted. "I say," he inquired lazily, "are you chained to this cage for any particular time?"

I answered, rather stiffly, that I made it a rule to remain till four o'clock, and one o'clock on Saturdays.

"Thames Darrell attended to his business, while the idle apprentice—I mean myself, of course, not Haviland—prepared himself for his ultimate felonious fate!" he observed flippantly. "But make an exception for once, and come with me now! I need you, and cannot find my way alone."

"Where do you want to go?" I asked.

He stopped, and dug his cane into a crack in the floor. Then, looking up with an air of mock determination, he observed slowly and distinctly—

"I want to go to the Northshore Bank in George Street to open an account."

Do what I would I could not restrain a gasp of astonishment.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, eyeing me solemnly, "I saw old Poole and you in deep consultation just now. In for a Pennifeather, in for ten thousand pounds! Give me the penny for my thoughts and I'll knock you down with the feather. Come on!"

Without another word I went.

He hailed a cab as we passed St Giles' Church, by the "Heart of Midlothian."

"Northshore Bank, George Street!" he shouted to the driver; and we were soon bowling down Bank Street and the Mound.

"Could you not have found your way in a cab without my assistance?" I asked, rather ungraciously.

Pennifeather grinned.

"I wanted you to introduce me," he remarked pleasantly.

"I'll see you damned first!" I retorted in horror.

"Too much Poole, taken early in the day, seems to disagree with you," he answered coolly. "However, here we are."

Telling the cabman to wait, he strolled up the steps into the outer lobby of the bank, whither I followed, feeling distinctly uncomfortable.

Buttonholing the gorgeous official at the door, he addressed him confidentially.

"I want," he said, "to see the responsible head of this establishment."

The porter looked him up and down superciliously; but he withstood the indignant scrutiny, calm and impassive.

"Securities department?" that functionary condescended at length to inquire; "cashier's department, or correspondence?"

"I want," repeated Pennifeather as before, "to see the responsible head of this establishment."

The porter's exasperation rendered him inarticulate. With a wave of the official fist he indicated a mournful gentleman roosting, railed off in a kind of parrot-cage, in a corner of the counting-room.

To this lonely bird Pennifeather again proffered his monotonous but peremptory request.

"I am afraid," said the parrot condescendingly, "that you can hardly see the Bank Secretary unless you have an appointment."

Pennifeather seemed nonplussed for a moment, sucking the end of his cane. Then he brightened up again as a thought struck him.

"Allow me to present my friend, Mr Robert Montgomery, Advocate," he said, "as a guarantee of good faith and respectability."

The caged one and I glared mutual defiance through the bars.

"And I want to see the responsible——"

"Yes, yes! You've said that before," the captive bird interrupted testily; "but unless you have an appointment——"

"Then," sighed Pennifeather with dejected resignation, "I shall have to take my information with regard to Mr Willis and his cheque elsewhere."

"Eh? What's that? One moment," cried the parrot in an altered voice, hopping excitedly off his perch, opening a little door, and jumping to the ground—"why didn't you say so before? Finlayson!" he shouted severely to the retiring Cerberus of the doorway, "my compliments to the Bank Secretary, and Mr—er——"

"Pennifeather," that gentleman prompted politely.

"Mr Pennifeather—quite so—is here to see him on important business, by appointment."

"And that's how it is done!" Pennifeather remarked to me triumphantly, as he departed in charge of the bank porter.

"I am afraid, Montgomery," he added, "that I must ask you to be good enough to wait in the cab. Shan't be two minutes. As I told you, I am just going to open an account, or—same thing—to make a report," and, with a solemn wink, he vanished behind folding-doors.

Quarter of an hour elapsed, however, before he reappeared on the outside steps, escorted by the liveried official, now reduced to an appropriate condition of subserviency, and accompanied, to my astonishment, by no less a person than the exclusive and elusive Bank Secretary himself, my friend Mr Blanemyre. The Secretary was a bald-headed, benevolent bachelor, of a Semitic cast of countenance, lurid of language as he was gentle in spirit, who dined out four nights a week, subscribed like a man to missions for the conversion of the Jews, and carried about with him a sweet savour of scented soap and East India sherry.

He started slightly on recognising me seated in the cab, and laid his finger on his lip, as if to assure me of secrecy raised to the nine thousand five hundredth power; then, shaking hands effusively with Pennifeather, he exclaimed—

“God bless you, my dear sir ! We all owe you a deep debt of gratitude, and, by the blessing of Providence, I trust we shall see the scoundrels grinning in the lowest pit of Tophet soon !”

Pennifeather shook the crutch end of his stick out of the cab window in reply as we drove away.

CHAPTER IX.

PENNIFEATHER OPENS ANOTHER ACCOUNT, AND ROBERT MONTGOMERY CONCLUDES HIS NARRATIVE.

WE drove straight to Palace Street, because, as Pennifeather sagely remarked, "the club's taboo—for me and you."

"The worthy Writer to the Signet must not see us together," he went on, "it might disturb, even distort, the calm reflections in the bosom of the Poole!"

Accordingly we snatched a hasty lunch in my room. Haviland was at Musselburgh playing a round of golf in preparation for the afternoon rehearsal, and Hamish was engaged at a consultation with Edinburgh and Glasgow solicitors over a shipping case that was coming on in Court on the following Tuesday.

"He will get rid of them in less than ten minutes," Hamish's clerk assured us with a grin. "Dod, you would think from the way they are trying to spoon-feed him, that he didn't know the differ between demurrage and democracy!"

"Give Mr Stuart my compliments," I answered severely, "and ask him to be kind enough to look in so soon as he is disengaged."

"You seem to be on terms of considerable formality here," Pennifeather observed when the clerk had departed on his errand.

"Woe betide the man," I replied, "who seeks to disturb either of the other two when he is not wanted; but here he comes," and at that moment Hamish entered the room.

After we had all got comfortably settled down, Hamish

and I having lighted our pipes, while Pennifeather trifled with a cigarette, the newcomer looked expectantly from one to the other, and said—

“Well? You seem rather anxious and perplexed about something, Robert. Can I be of any assistance?”

“Yes,” I answered, “we want your advice, three heads being better than two——”

“And one hard head being more than equal to two soft ones,” Pennifeather explained parenthetically.

“We want to consult you—at least Pennifeather does—for I don’t profess to understand the situation yet.”

“I am all attention,” said Hamish, sitting back in his chair.

“In the first place, then,” Pennifeather observed in his usual drawl, “I should like Montgomery to tell you a little story that he got from the silent Poole this morning, about the recent negotiation here in Edinburgh of a crossed cheque for ten thousand pounds to which Mr Langworthy’s name had been forged.”

Accordingly, as tersely and perspicuously as possible, I explained the gist of that matter, as I have set it down in a previous chapter.

Pennifeather seemed to listen very attentively, and once or twice interrupted in order to clear up some small discrepancy.

“Now,” he said, when that was over, “I should like to hear what Mr Langworthy had to say about the loan to his late brother, and the manner in which that ten thousand also vanished.”

“How do you know anything about that?” I asked, with a gasp of astonishment.

“Shall tell you presently,” returned Pennifeather quietly; “meantime, please let us hear.”

I considered the matter for a moment, and then answered somewhat reluctantly—

“So far as I know, there is no secret about it; but as you seem so well informed, suppose you tell us what you know!”

“Certainly,” said Pennifeather, lazily exhaling a puff of smoke. “Correct me if I am wrong!”

Then he went on to explain how Mr Langworthy had

lent his scapegrace brother James ten thousand pounds, how the brother had banked the money at Rigby's Bank, and how an open cheque drawn by James had been presented next day and the money paid away.

"Now, as I understand," Pennifeather continued, "Mr Christopher Langworthy, as his brother's executor, has applied to the London bank to be put in funds to the extent of this ten thousand pounds; is that not so?"

"It is," I admitted; "and for some unexplained reason he maintains that the cheque, ostensibly drawn by James, must be a forgery. This the bank, naturally enough, refuses to admit; and James, the drawer, being dead, and the cheque being the first number in the cheque-book delivered to him, and the signature corresponding with his specimen signature, it appears to me that the bank's position is unassailable."

Hamish nodded assent.

"I suggested to Mr Poole," I continued, "that it would have been a wise precaution had Mr Langworthy insured his brother's life, having an insurable interest to the amount of his loan, and no security."

"You did!" cried Pennifeather eagerly. "Good Lord!" and he lay back in his chair again without another word.

"But so far as I could gather," I continued, looking, I suppose, rather annoyed by this sudden outburst, "that had not been done."

"And that's the whole story?" asked Hamish.

"So far as I know," I agreed, "that is the whole story."

"And now," said Pennifeather in an altered tone of voice, straightening himself in his seat and stuffing his eyeglass in his pocket, "I want you fellows to give me your attention while I tell you another little tale, or rather a succession of tales, and let us see if we can disentangle matters a bit."

The sudden change in the man was almost startling. With the disappearance of the eyeglass his whole demeanour became transformed, and he sat there apparently impressive and determined, the picture of resourceful energy and resolution.

"I don't mean to trouble you with the 'story of my life,' he began. "It is sufficient to say that, some years

ago, a reverse of fortune—for reasons not unconnected with the sport of kings, as our friend Proudly might say—found me in the proud position of manager of a branch bank in a city in the West Riding. I had been trained as an accountant, and was lucky enough to obtain this employment at a period of emergency.

“There came to reside in the vicinity a man evidently of considerable wealth, calling himself Allen Aylesbury. He became a customer of my bank, where he kept large balances, always on current account, on which he operated freely. More than once I remonstrated with him for paying away considerable sums by means of uncrossed bearer cheques; but he only laughed, telling me that many of the West Riding farmers, horse-dealers, and others with whom he had transactions kept no banking account—which was quite true, by the way—but after that he promised to cross his cheques when feasible, suggesting to me that I should endeavour to get some of those who came to cash his bearer cheques to pay in the money with me, and so start fresh business.

“This Mr Allen Aylesbury,” Pennifeather continued, looking directly at me, “was a striking-looking man of about five-and-forty, with a leonine head of dark auburn hair, a full beard carefully brushed outwards, a merry eye, a jovial voice, and an unmistakable Berwickshire or Northumbrian ‘burr.’”

This graphic and obviously allusive description certainly did not decrease my interest in the story which the speaker proceeded to unfold.

“One day,” Pennifeather went on as before, “Mr Aylesbury came to me in a state of suppressed excitement, asking me if, among my other accomplishments, I knew anything of pictures. Of course, every man fancies himself an expert in wine, women, pictures, and the tying of neckties; so, greatly flattered, I agreed to go to his house to inspect a ‘find’ that he thought he had secured. As matter of fact I know less than nothing of art, but was idiotic enough to profess to admire two portraits which he showed me there, declaring them masterpieces.

“‘They are Raeburns, both of them,’ he said to me impressively, ‘unmistakable Raeburns! You may well call them masterpieces, my dear sir! I found them in a miserable little shop in Northgate kept by a poor devil without a farthing to bless himself.’

“‘Then you picked them up for a song, I suppose?’ I asked, rather cynically I am afraid.

“He flushed deeply at the suggestion.

“‘No, sir!’ he answered, with considerable dignity, ‘that is not Allen Aylesbury’s way! I have been poor myself, and know too well what that means to grind the faces of the poor. I shall take expert advice—a man is arriving from London to-day—and whatever he declares to be the value of the pictures, that I shall pay. By the way, what balance have I lying with you at present?’

“I said I thought it was about five thousand pounds.

“‘Then don’t be surprised,’ he replied merrily, ‘if that poor beggar—Herbert Grayson is his name—walks off with the whole of it to-morrow. You will have to overcome your repugnance to uncrossed cheques for once, I am afraid!’

“‘Perhaps I may get him to open an account with me on this windfall!’ I answered hopefully.

“‘Perhaps,’ he returned, with a smile.

“Well, sure enough, next day Mr Herbert Grayson, a little man with a big head, arrived at the bank and presented Mr Aylesbury’s cheque in his favour for five thousand pounds. He seemed almost delirious with delight—scouting my tentative suggestion about opening an account, and demanded the whole sum in gold. With difficulty he was persuaded to accept Bank of England notes; and then he departed, weeping with joy.

“Another day passed (during which time, I may say parenthetically, every one of these notes was changed and changed again in different parts of England), and, next morning, behold! another joyful Christian arrived, presenting another cheque in favour of Herbert Grayson for five thousand pounds, also signed by Mr Allen Aylesbury! With a horrible misgiving, I hunted out the cheque that I had already cashed. There was no doubt

about it—it was a palpable forgery! Having been led to expect the advent of the customer, I must have been less careful than usual. What could I do? Mr Aylesbury was, of course, very sorry, even profuse in his sympathy, but, in his humble opinion, the bank was clearly liable. The second joyful Christian was the redoubtable Herbert Grayson of the shop in Northgate. The first was a fraud. That rogue must have got wind of the real Grayson's luck and anticipated him by carrying out the swindle. There was nothing for it but to pay up and look pleasant; so bang went almost the last five thousand of my diminishing patrimony! The bank was very good about it, but quite firm, as is the nature of banks. I refunded the lost five thousand pounds and retired, with the consent and approval of my employers, into private life."

"Rough luck!" Hamish commiserated.

"And did the real Herbert Grayson subsequently get his five thousand pounds?" I asked.

"I never cashed a cheque with a worse grace," replied Pennifeather ruefully. "But now, mark the sequel! Grayson shut up shop and fled. Aylesbury retired from the neighbourhood, and was heard of no more. After a time these very pictures were put up at Christie's, and openly sold for £13,000 and £15,000 respectively; and it was afterwards discovered that they had been cut out of their frames in a deserted mansion-house in the north of Scotland. The estates of the deceased owner had been sequestrated, and were being wound up by an Edinburgh lawyer—our dear friend Poole; and the pictures, being considered of no value by his valuer, had been inventoried at something like five pounds each. But they fetched £28,000 when sold at Christie's by the thief or his confederates. What do you make of it?"

"It seems like a colossal swindle," was all that I could say.

"It was!" answered Pennifeather grimly, "a double swindle, I should say. Let us take it that Aylesbury Grayson, and the weeping, joyful Christian were acting in concert. The Christian gets Aylesbury's original £5000 out of the bank; Grayson gets my £5000 out of

my pocket; and, between them, they share the price of the stolen pictures—a clear profit of £33,000 in all, or £11,000 to each of them.”

“And were the pictures genuine?” Hamish asked.

“Genuine, and sold in market overt,” replied Pennifeather. “Needless to say, the exposers cannot now be found.”

“And so the creditors on the sequestrated estate are left to gnash their teeth!” said Hamish with a faint chuckle. “I am sorry for the trustee.”

“The Accountant of Court may have something to say in the matter when the time comes,” I observed sagely. “This is all very interesting, of course,” I went on, “but I don’t quite see the relevancy——”

“There speaks the Scottish lawyer,” laughed Pennifeather. “An extra syllable to an ordinary English word entitles to a bigger fee, I suppose! But I am not quite finished yet.”

“Go on, then!” I demanded.

“From that hour,” Pennifeather continued, resuming his more earnest manner, “I resolved to devote my entire energy to the pursuit and unmasking of Mr Allen Aylesbury and his pestilential crew. Fortunately, I am once more independent, and can afford time and money to gratify that praiseworthy ambition. I make myself a complete nuisance in all the banks and insurance offices of the country, and am working hard for further protection in the forthcoming Act of Parliament. Many of my friends regard me with good-humoured toleration, as an eccentric but harmless crank. Others, especially young men in branch offices, I have been able to save from some skilfully-contrived pitfalls. Now I have a regular practice as private consultant in all sorts of difficulties and emergencies.”

“You don’t mean to say,” I cried as a light burst upon me, “that you are the mysterious B. I. F. D.?”

Pennifeather nodded.

“‘In me the modern type behold!’ as our friend Haviland sings. I am the veritable, original ‘Bank and Insurance Fraud Detector,’ and no other!”

“Then,” I exclaimed, looking at him with wonder and

surprise, "I now understand the beck and bow of Mr Blanemyre, Secretary of the Northshore!"

"Thus one entertains angels unawares," said Hamish heartily. "I have heard of your work, and seen traces of it more than once. I really am glad to meet you in the flesh!"

"Thanks!" returned Pennifeather, rather drily; "we shall get on better in future, you and I, perhaps," and he laughed outright as the other blushed, for up to that time I strongly suspect that Hamish had neither believed in Pennifeather nor cared for him much.

"But, to proceed," Pennifeather resumed: "two or three days before the Elspeth Junction railway accident, I happened to stroll into an insurance office in the city, the manager of which I know, though I do not love him. His is a young office and he takes big risks, so much so that it would not surprise me were he reduced to live on his grand piano, like Mr Tigg Montague."

We smiled an acquiescent recollection of the reference.

"In the course of conversation," Pennifeather continued, "he told me, with much satisfaction, that he had just done a deal with the great Mr Christopher Langworthy of philanthropic fame. 'It's rather out of the ordinary run,' he observed confidentially. 'Mr Langworthy came here explaining that he had just lent his brother, James Langworthy, £10,000 on his bare I.O.U., which he produced, and intimated his desire to insure his brother's life for that sum. I said that would be all right, but we must first see his brother. He pondered for a little and then promised to send him, adding with a laugh that I should have no difficulty in recognising him when he appeared. In about an hour the brother called, and, by Gad, the likeness was almost laughable. It turns out that they are twins. Next day back came Mr Christopher, who told me casually that James had lodged the sum in Rigby's Bank. By means of a private message we found that to be so, so we effected the insurance. Mr Christopher Langworthy paid the first premium, and walked off with the policy in his pocket.' Such was the story told me by my friend the manager of the insurance office."

"So that was the reason for your ejaculation when I spoke of a life insurance just now?" I interrogated.

"Precisely!" said Pennifeather. "Now somehow the whole transaction struck me as odd; so, without a word, down I posted to Rigby's, where I learned *sub rosa* that James Langworthy had that day granted a cheque for the full amount, and the recipient was just leaving the bank. Off I dashed in pursuit, and there, on the pavement in front of me, jumping into a hansom, I caught sight of a little man with a big head who was either my friend the joyful weeping Christian or the devil!"

Hamish put down his pipe and, placing his hands on his knees, gazed earnestly at the speaker.

"You followed, of course?" he asked breathlessly.

"I did, but my luck was out. I lost him."

"What next?" I prompted.

"I hurried back to Rigby's," Pennifeather replied, "and found a teller tearing his hair. As I suspected, the cheque was a wrong 'un."

"Then Mr Langworthy's suspicions are justified!" I exclaimed.

Pennifeather favoured me with a peculiar glance.

"Yes," he answered; "if it is only a suspicion, it is a shrewd one. The engraving had been cleverly altered, but there was no blinking the fact. The cheque was not one of those supplied to James Langworthy. It was a colourable imitation."

"And what did you advise?" asked Hamish.

"There was nothing for it but to sit tight, to wait and hope; and the unfortunate teller has been waiting and hoping ever since."

"Of course, I see," I cried; "James was killed the following night!"

"And his cheque-book most probably destroyed in the train fire," Hamish added.

"You are getting warm on the scent!" replied Pennifeather approvingly.

"Then do I understand your theory to be," I asked, after a slight interval, "that this was another attempted plant, and that the deceased James was no other than your friend, Mr Allen Aylesbury?"

Pennifeather pitched his cigarette viciously into the fireplace.

"Give me a pipe and baccy one of you fellows, I want to smoke!" he ejaculated irritably.

"That," he said, after he was well alight, "seems the simple solution, so far. If the small man with the big head who presented the cheque was really my Wakefield friend, it is a fair deduction that his principal, who masqueraded as Allen Aylesbury there, is, or rather was, Mr James Langworthy. It was a repetition of the old dodge. His confederate having obtained the money on a cleverly forged cheque, Mr James intended afterwards to demand payment once more, on the plea that it had been improperly paid away, and so double his capital at one fell swoop. Unfortunately for him he is killed, and the scheme collapses. No one can prove now that the cheque presented by the man who escaped in the hansom was not the authentic writ of the deceased swindler."

"Then, so far as the teller at Rigby's is concerned," said Hamish, "that seems to end the matter, now that James is dead."

"Yes," said Pennifeather thoughtfully, "if James is dead."

"Now what do you imply by that?" I asked.

"What do you make of this insurance business?" Pennifeather retorted. "Curious, is it not, that Mr Langworthy has made no claim?"

"He may have forgotten," I suggested.

"You have seen him," Pennifeather replied pointedly. "Does that occur to you as really a probable solution?"

"I cannot say that it does," I was forced to admit, "but it is at least possible; and the policy itself, which would have refreshed his memory, may also have been destroyed in the train-wreck."

Pennifeather smoked silently for a few moments.

"What do you think of it?" he inquired at length, turning to Hamish

"Of course," the other replied, "one sees at once a simple explanation. The insurance may have been

another scheme of the wily James. He may have effected the policy himself, personating his brother on the first and third occasion, and going as himself on the second."

"True!" Pennifeather assented; "that seems pretty obvious."

"Then it appears to me," I said, "that very little is left to cause either of your clients any anxiety. The death of James has cut the Gordian knot, both for the bank and the insurance company."

"True again!" said Pennifeather, "if James is really dead."

"But he was killed; we all know that."

"One of the brothers was killed in the railway accident—at any rate one of them was killed in the train," Pennifeather answered solemnly; "but how do we know that it was James?"

I laughed the suggestion to scorn.

"Do you mean to insinuate that Christopher was killed, and that the man in Queen Anne Square is an impostor?" I asked derisively.

"If James Langworthy and Allen Aylesbury are one and the same, as I believe them to be," Pennifeather answered sternly, "there is no crime—none at which he would stick for the sake of gain. If it was to benefit James that Christopher should die—as it undoubtedly was, when you consider his millions—in my view, Christopher was as good as dead."

"Do you see where you are leading us?" cried Hamish.

"Perfectly!" replied Pennifeather. "There are two alternatives. Take it that the survivor is really Christopher; then his failure to claim the insurance money is explicable on the theory that he knew nothing of the insurance itself. He also knew nothing of the withdrawal of the £10,000 from the bank by means of the forged cheque, and so made no claim there either till after he was confirmed executor to his brother. That is one view."

"And, to my mind, pretty conclusive," I added.

"But the arresting thing is," Pennifeather continued,

"that the surviving Mr Langworthy should suggest ultroneously that James's cheque on Rigby's is forged."

"Pooh!" said I, "these are mere *verba jactantia*, as old Braxfield would have said, the angry and indignant ebullition of an exasperated man who discovers that, somehow, he has been defrauded of this huge sum."

"Perhaps!" said Pennifeather thoughtfully; "but what about this last game in Edinburgh with the Northshore and the Midlothian? It bears a suspicious resemblance to the Wakefield trick. Does that not point to the possible alternative that the man in Queen Anne Square may be Allen Aylesbury *alias* James Langworthy?"

"You are assuming all this time," I objected, "that these two, James Langworthy and Allen Aylesbury, are one and the same!"

"I am assuming nothing," Pennifeather replied impressively—"I know! You remember that photograph in the music-room?"

"Which you dropped on the floor?"

"Yes. I managed by a simple subterfuge to see the back of it. It is a lifelike representation of Allen Aylesbury, and was done in Wakefield, where I was a bank agent, four years ago."

We sat for a few moments in stunned silence.

"However that may be," I asserted obstinately, "Mr Langworthy, now in the house at Queen Anne Square, is the father of Maria, the man whom I have known for years."

"Now, let us investigate this," said Pennifeather, "remembering the extraordinary resemblance between the two brothers. You yourself told me that our Mr Langworthy has a bad memory. At your interview, did he voluntarily recall any incident in your previous intercourse that he may not have learned quite recently?"

"Oh! the whole thing is absurd!" I exclaimed impatiently—"of course he did, hundreds of things!"

"For instance?"

"For instance a story about my rock-like head," I laughed.

Again Pennifeather looked pointedly at me.

"You mean the story which was told in the music-room on the previous day?" he asked.

"What if it was? He was not there to hear!"

"No," said Pennifeather drily, "but there were others."

"Oh! if you are about to make insinuations in regard to Maria," I exclaimed, starting up, "I am off!"

"Sit down again like a good chap!" said Hamish quietly. "Personally I have no doubt that you are right; but, for Heaven's sake, let us get this thing thrashed out! Don't you see that if there is any foundation for Pennifeather's surmise, Maria is in danger?"

"Maria is in no danger!" I retorted. "I know that her father's one thought is for her and her happiness. Besides, is it conceivable that she should not recognise an impudent imposition?"

"Again let us investigate," Pennifeather resumed, quite unmoved. "You remember her innocent little story of her father's surprise when she threw herself into his arms in the room in the Savoy, and of how both brothers—both, mind you!—thought it an excellent and merry joke?"

"Certainly," I replied. "What then?"

"Does it not occur to you as at least possible that the cause of the surprise in the first instance was that she mistakenly embraced the wrong brother, and that they thereafter kept up the joke between them? Remember she was only a child when she last saw her father! Now she is a woman."

I was silenced, but remembering the secret trust money that I held for Maria's benefit, quite unconvinced.

"Go on!" said Hamish hoarsely.

"Then we have the sudden sale of the estate which had just been bought, and the conversion of the purchase price into portable securities, the anxiety of the survivor to know whether he can legally recover damages for his brother's death, and whether he can defeat his daughter's claim to her legal rights—for I know all about it, you see," he smiled slightly as he turned to me—"the alterations upon the house, which

have surprised me more than I can tell you at present—all pointing to confirm my half-formed suspicions. If I am right, if James killed Christopher in the train before the accident, or if Christopher was the man that was killed in the smash, then the man now lying at Queen Anne Square, who has that lovely and innocent girl wholly in his power and at his mercy, is not her father at all, but James Langworthy, or Allen Aylesbury, or whatever he may call himself—and I think I know another *alias*—the greatest thief, forger, and murderer that ever cheated the gallows!”

“My God!” exclaimed Hamish, pale to the lips.

“Then what do you propose that we should do?” he asked at length.

“My hope is in Harry Haviland,” said Pennifeather. “His supersensitised brain responds to the most momentary impressions. It is true that he saw that vision in the railway train only for an instant, but it was the instant before the engine leaped into the chasm. Once we get him somehow face to face with the man upstairs, he will know and remember whether his were the eyes into which he looked at that supreme moment.”

“Granted that they were,” I contested, “what will that prove?”

“It will prove,” said Pennifeather, “that, prior to the accident, the man upstairs had an insensible body in his arms, a fact which he has never yet disclosed. It is unthinkable that Christopher could have attacked James, just as unthinkable as it is that Christopher should never have told that James lay insensible in his arms prior to the collision.”

“I don’t like all this, I confess,” I said, rising once more; “I believe you are wrong—wildly wrong—the whole thing seems to me fantastic and chimerical!”

“At the same time,” said Hamish, “what if it be true? I confess that the photograph incident impresses me most unfavourably. Are you, or are your clients, prepared to take any steps?” he asked, addressing Pennifeather.

“We must walk warily,” that gentleman replied; “meantime let us haunt the music-room! That opera of

Haviland's is an excellent excuse. Let us wait and watch!"

"A poor prescription, rather!" Hamish exclaimed testily. "Have you nothing further to suggest?"

"From to-night till Monday," said Pennifeather, "I am supposed to be in London."

"And where in reality?"

"I am off to the scene of the railway accident."

"Not much to be gained there by this time, I am afraid!" I cried.

Pennifeather laughed apologetically.

"'I have a glimmering,' as Haviland would say," he answered lightly, "so *au revoir* till four o'clock;" and I conducted him to the door.

On my return to the room, I found Hamish pacing the floor in great agitation.

"What if half of that fellow's story be true?" he burst out.

"Oh! confound the man, with his theories and suggestions," I responded pettishly; "believe me it is all mere moonshine."

"It is easy for you to take it so placidly," he returned, almost savagely; "in the meantime Maria may be in deadly peril!"

Poor Hamish! I looked at him with grave compassion.

"She sent you her love," I said softly.

"Eh!" he exclaimed, stopping short.

"Her dear love," I continued.

He regarded me silently, and rather wildly.

"And, Hamish——"

"Yes! yes!" he prompted.

"I think that she meant what she said!"

In an instant he had wrung my hand warmly. Then he rushed with vehemence from the room, and I heard the outer door clang behind him.

Harry, returned from his golf match, looked in shortly afterwards, to find me sitting dejectedly at my desk, head in hands.

"Has Hamish got news of a fortune?" he asked; "he went by me like a whirlwind, with a shining face."

"Yes!" I said steadily, "I think Hamish has just had some good news!"

"Lucky beggar!" quoth Harry. "Come on! It's time to go to Queen Anne Square. Perhaps we shall see him there to offer our congratulations!"

"Yes," I said, "I think it extremely probable that we shall find him there!"

"Lucky beggar!"

Alas, poor Harry! poor Harry!

BOOK II.

THE DOWNFALL OF HAVILAND.

THE NARRATIVE OF HAMISH STUART.

"If imputation and strong circumstances,
Which lead directly to the door of truth,
Will give you satisfaction, you may have 't."

—*Othello*, Act III. Sc. iii.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTINE O'MARA OFFERS SOME SOUND ADVICE.

I HAVE read the preceding chapters, written by my old friend Lord Advocate Montgomery—Robert the indomitable, the trustful, the indefatigable and invincible champion of our once dear Maria, of whom, as he truly says, we were all the devoted slaves. Unlike Robert himself and Harry Haviland, I was not a son of the misty capital of the North. Trained, as I was, in the University of cold, grey, hard-bitten, granite-faced, but warm-hearted Aberdeen, it was not until a couple of years before being called to the Bar that I arrived in this city of many memories, which has ever since been the home of my dreams, though mountains and a waste of seas have divided us these many years. Here I met and loved that bright, impulsive, wayward, meteoric spirit, Harry Haviland, the “marvellous boy,” whose loss I can never cease to deplore. Here I formed the fast-linked friendship of Robert Montgomery, the placid, straightforward, perspicuous, clear-thinking, high-souled lawyer, concealing, beneath a cloak of seeming intellectual aloofness and hauteur, a wealth of romantic fervour and poetic fire. And here I succumbed in a flash to the beauty, charm, and fascination of the never-forgotten Maria Langworthy.

“Strange it would be! aye, passing strange,” as Horatio Proudly once observed in a moment of rhetorical exaltation, “that such a woman should be seen and heard—a woman of such accomplishment, talent, and gracious loveliness—without her bewitching influence being experienced, and one’s softer emotions bestirred!”

I shut my eyes as I sit here, and there emerges from the shadowy past a picture of that sweet girlish figure, as I first beheld her, standing on the platform of the music-room in the Queen Anne Square house, her hands meekly crossed upon her bosom, her large grey eyes, now melting with tenderness, now flashing in scorn, her red-gold hair a gleaming aureole in the ray of sunlight that shone on her through the western window. She was singing, as only she could sing, a "Song of Circe," written for her by Harry Haviland, while Christine O'Mara sat at the piano beside her, and Harry himself made melody on his Amati 'cello.

Musician I am not; but I have never forgotten the song, or the impression it made upon me; and, indeed, I had good cause to remember, in days that were to come.

"Alas ! encircled by relentless fate,
 Hopeless, companionless, I seek a mate—
 Him whom my spells and charms shall not control,
 In form a man, but god-like in his soul !
 Blameless and temperate—at my magic feast
 Shall bear himself all human, not all beast—
 With brow serene, my potent arts defy—
 Him shall I wed and worship ; and enchantments dire lay by !

Here, in secluded grove,
 Mistress of Fate—
 Longing for his true love,
 Maiden, I wait !
 Cursed by my magic art,
 Swift to their lairs depart
 Men, who are brutes at heart,
 Moaning their state !

Spurn not the mystic spell
 Cast o'er the feast,
 God-given charm, to tell
 Manhood from beast !
 Zeus ! send me o'er the waves
 Him who my dread power braves,
 And, of his meanest slaves
 I shall be least !"

As the last sweet cadence died away in an exquisitely pure and liquid note I seemed to awake to a new life. My pulses thrilled, my heart beat, my eyes became dim.

No more the grovelling, self-satisfied, doggedly ambitious young northern prig that had entered the room a few minutes before, I was transformed to a humble worshipper and adorer at the shrine of the divine Maria.

Ecstatically I whispered to myself, "This is *the* woman, the only woman in the wide world for me!" Could it be possible that I had lived all the years that were past and gone, without her? And, once having seen her, how could I face the future, except with her dear presence by my side?

"All that the song demands," I thought, "I shall be, to win her love—sober, strong-souled, and self-controlled! For her sweet sake will I do and dare anything! I will climb without envy, renounce without bitterness, serve without selfishness, and believe without doubt."

Ah! Robert Montgomery, how did I fail when came the evil day, how did I fall from that youthful emotion and resolution! When all men were against her, when the shadow of impending doom hung darkly over her fair young life, shame on me that it was you, and not I, that proved her doughtiest champion and defender! Guilty or innocent, who was I that I should judge, and faint-heartedly fail her in the hour of her great need? What did I do or dare? I dared to disbelieve, to trust the undisciplined impulse of a jealous heart, the mistaken impressions of my purblind senses. And I renounced, not those who pointed at her the finger of scorn—I renounced the woman whom I loved and deserted. Dear Robert Montgomery! when that great day dawns in which we shall all be judged in mercy according to our works, surely a place will be reserved for you, high among the noble, trustful, immortal souls who believed without having seen, and remained steadfast in their faith! Here do I make humble confession of the weak and wayward cowardice whose memory goads me still, after all these years, with secret pangs of unavailing remorse.

But all this is by the way, and I now proceed to take up the narrative from the point where the Lord Advocate has left it.

When I rushed impulsively from the Palace Street house, after our disturbing interview with Pennifeather, I had come to the firm determination that I should then and there put my fate to the test. It might be that my darling stood in dire peril. I hardly believed it, nor did I want to do so; but Pennifeather's surmises and suspicions were, to say the least, perplexing and ominous, and Robert's kindly suggestion rang a message of encouragement in my ears. Small as I knew my deserts to be, my hopes ran high. If danger threatened she should not lack a shield and protector; and so, confident in the receipt of her sweet message, I set out to offer my large hand and small fortune to Maria Langworthy.

Considerably agitated by all that I had heard, I entered the gardens of Princes Street before proceeding to Queen Anne Square, like Prospero to walk a turn or two, and still my beating mind. The regimental band from the Castle was playing in the bandstand; so, turning aside to escape the crowd, I crossed by one of the railway footbridges to the shady path under the grim and rugged "dusky grandeur" of the rock. Sauntering along this deserted and secluded way, I suddenly came upon a man and woman sitting together on one of the benches in a sequestered spot. The man, who seemed a common-looking, ill-dressed young fellow, wearing a soiled white scarf round his throat and a greasy cap pulled down over his ears, appeared to be talking in a masterful tone to the plainly-clad young woman at his side. She looked up as I approached, and to my surprise I recognised Christine O'Mara. As I walked briskly forward her companion shuffled away hastily, muttering some unintelligible excuse, and I followed him with my eyes as he slunk off across the bridge and mingled with the crowd on the other side, where he was soon lost to view.

"Has that fellow been annoying you?" I asked, seating myself beside her after shaking hands.

"Annoying me?" she echoed carelessly. "Oh dear, no! He was only begging. We are accustomed to that kind of thing who live with Mr Langworthy."

"Do you know him, then?" I inquired.

"I never saw him in my life before," she answered coolly.

"Hum!" I commented. "It seemed to me that there was something vaguely familiar about his appearance."

"Perhaps," she answered, with a slight shrug, "he may be one of your late clients in the criminal court. But I am sorry," she added, rising, "my time is up. I must return to duty."

"If you are going home," I said, "I shall be glad to accompany you. Queen Anne Square is my destination also."

She assented silently, and we strolled off together.

"Tell me," she said suddenly, at length breaking in upon a rather uncomfortable pause, "what does Mr Montgomery think of my uncle, now that he has seen him?"

"Think of him," I repeated stupidly, "in what way?"

"I mean, does he find him much changed? Does he appear to him"—and there seemed to my mind a subtle intonation in the words—"the same man that he used to be?"

She gave me a keen searching glance as she asked the question, and, for the life of me, I could not refrain from a slight start of surprise.

"Oh!" I laughed lightly in return, after a moment's interval, "Montgomery, as you know, is not a communicative person; but he is obviously impressed by the fact that Mr Langworthy's illness has not rendered him less kind-hearted and charitable than before."

"He is the soul of generosity," replied Christine, with more show of warmth and feeling than I had given her credit for, "which he displays sometimes in the most unexpected fashions. He makes us all dispense his bounties."

"Well, so far as I know, he has not appointed Robert one of the dispensers," I remarked jocularly.

All this time I felt, rather than saw, that my companion continued to eye me with a sidelong glance of peculiar interest.

"Poor Mr Langworthy!" she sighed at length. "I am

afraid that his charities are too often bestowed upon unworthy recipients."

We walked on together in silence. For myself, I felt in no mood for polite conversation, and my companion was evidently lost in thought. As I glanced from time to time at her clear-cut profile I could not help thinking how sad it was that a face so nearly beautiful should be marred by a total lack of expression or animation, that she should wear her dull dark hair dressed so very unbecomingly, and that she should bear about with her the burden of an almost grotesque deformity. On the other hand, she seemed to limp less painfully to-day, and her expression was altogether brighter, more alert, and less morose than usual. Her only real attraction lay in her voice—her speaking voice, I mean—for she always protested with many regrets that she could not sing. Certainly it did seem hard, and strange as well; for she was a musician to her finger-tips, and the full sweet tones in which she spoke gave promise of a power of song.

Breaking the constrained silence at last, she exclaimed almost breathlessly—

"Mr Stuart! Of course I am only a dependant in that house, and have no right to interfere; but don't you think it a thousand pities that things are allowed to go on as they do?"

"Things go on?" I repeated, rather taken aback. Now, what do you precisely mean by that?"

"I am thinking of Maria," she answered, pressing her hands together. "She is everything that is fresh, fascinating, and delightful; but, after all, she is a motherless girl, young and impulsive, with no one to guide and advise her—an heiress, and therefore an easy prey to—shall I say penniless adventurers?"

"If you mean me——" I began in expostulation.

But Christine was obviously in earnest, and ignored the interruption.

"I do not mean anything personal or impertinent. I am sure you know that, Mr Stuart," she replied; "but, strange as it may appear to you, and almost in spite of myself, I have grown to love Maria, and my one

desire is to shield her from even the breath of scandal or the chance of harm or wrong. I have felt for some time that there should be some supervision—some chaperon—in the music-room. I am old-fashioned, I suppose,” she added, with a deprecating smile.

“I confess that the idea never occurred to me,” I said, still somewhat ruffled. “We are all young, it is true, but surely we know how to behave. Besides, there is Honoria M'Skimming, and Mrs Poole when necessary, and—er——”

“And myself,” she concluded, as I hesitated. “But who am I? a mere piece of furniture, as I am sure Mr Montgomery thinks me.”

This was so disconcertingly true that for the moment I was rather at a loss; but, still desirous of diverting the conversation into a less serious channel, I replied—

“As matter of fact, I was about to say that there is also Horatio Proudly. Where could you find a chaperon more dignified and oratorical?”

She smiled at this, but still persisted.

“I think that some one should see that Maria chooses her intimates and associates with greater discretion.”

“Come,” I said, as by common consent we turned and retraced our footsteps along the path under the rock, “let us reason this thing out. To which of us does your observation apply? First, there is Harry. You don't object to Harry, surely?”

There was almost a caressing sweetness in the golden tones of her voice as she murmured in reply—

“No; I do not object to Harry.”

For a moment I glanced at her sharply, but her face remained immobile and expressionless as usual.

“Then,” I went on, “there are Robert, and Proudly, and myself. Any objection there?”

“No, no!” she protested, with a half-vexed laugh; “but don't you see, you foolish people, that you are all in love with Maria, and——”

“We are all what?” I shouted.

“Of course you are all in love with her,” she repeated, with the calm certainty of one stating an elementary proposition. “You may not know it, but you are;

and some day you will be flying at each other's throats, and then——"

"There will be the devil to pay," I finished gloomily. "You are a most observant young person, Miss O'Mara," I continued, "but I confess that the possibility of such a contretemps never occurred to me."

"And now that it does occur to you," she returned demurely, "am I not right? Should things go on as they are, or have you any other solution to suggest?"

"What can I do?" I asked in an aggrieved tone. "What right have I?"

She stopped suddenly on the gravel path and turned towards me.

"Why not acquire a right?" she almost whispered.

"What do you mean?" I asked, flushing.

She touched me lightly on the sleeve.

"Marry her yourself!" she said incisively.

I laughed an embarrassed laugh, and answered—

"That advice precisely coincides with my own inclinations. To marry Maria is the dearest wish of my heart; but what will she say? and how about her father? Am I not, as you hinted just now, only 'a penniless adventurer'?"

"Faint heart! faint heart!" she answered, with a tinge of melancholy: "I took you for a man of moral courage. If I were a man, and in your place—aye, even knowing what I know—I would marry Maria Langworthy to-morrow! And if you knew what it costs me to say that—but there!" she broke off, "it is not for such as I to turn sentimental. Go to Maria, if you love her. God knows how soon she may need a home and a guiding and controlling hand! Her father may never rise again from his bed; and even were he to recover, it would be well—but it is not for me to speak."

She certainly seemed in deadly earnest, and labouring under an emotion that she could with difficulty suppress; and I have often wondered whether we might not all have been spared a wealth of pain and grief had I taken advantage of her melting mood that day and implored her to confide in me more openly. But

the opportunity slipped by, and, manlike, I proceeded to dally with the prospect she had opened up and to belittle myself for the pleasure of being contradicted.

"If all that Maria needs is a guiding and controlling hand," I said, "think of the claims of Robert Montgomery!"

"I have considered them," Christine replied in matter-of-fact tones; "but there is one insuperable objection—she does not love him."

"Then Harry?" I suggested anxiously.

"They are far too much alike," she answered at once, with great decision. "Don't you see that for yourself? He is as much in need of guidance as she—nay, more. Together, they would drift along the easy tide of commonplace. With Maria, he would never rise to anything higher than silly verses, like his exhibition of the other day. Harry is a bright particular star. In proper environment he will not only shine—he will coruscate. No! I am afraid," she concluded, "it must be you or no one!"

"How about Proudly, then?" I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"He will marry Honoria M'Skimming," she said.

"Never!" I exclaimed, laughing.

"Believe me or not, he will marry Honoria M'Skimming before you are two years older."

And, to show the marvellous prescience of this shrewd young woman, I may say at once that the prophecy was fulfilled to the letter.

"But all this time we have forgotten Pennifeather!" I cried at last.

The unwonted gleam of interested and even friendly companionship that had shone in Christine's eyes was quenched as if by magic. The light vanished from her face, and it was with a look of calm contempt that she answered coldly—

"Who is Mr Pennifeather?"

Thinking of our recent conversation, I could not help wondering whether her uncle might not be better able to enlighten her ignorance than I.

"I don't know who he is," I said. "Do you disapprove of him?"

She drew her brows together and tossed her head, as she replied disdainfully—

"Mr Stuart, I had no thought of speaking to you as I have done to-day. Had you encountered me at any other time, the chances that I should have done so are remote indeed. Don't be surprised if the conversation is never renewed. I know my duty, and endeavour to do it. But, for the last time, let me implore you to do your best to keep Mr Pennifeather from Queen Anne Square. I mistrust him, not without reason"—and a baleful glance shot from her eye,—“I mistrust his influence on Maria, and all of you. I suspect him of anything but disinterested motives. Believe me, he is not what he seems.”

I looked at her curiously.

"But you have never seen him before," I urged. "You know no more of him than any of us."

"I have a woman's instinct," she answered shortly, her mouth set in a vindictive straight line. "It was an evil day for Maria and the household that saw Mr Pennifeather admitted to the intimacy of the music-room!"

Now why should the secretive and simple Christine O'Mara, secretary and niece of the philanthropic Mr Christopher Langworthy, have such a determined distaste to a bank and insurance fraud detector? In a moment I was launched once more upon a sea of suspicion and conjecture.

By this time, however, our conversation had brought us to Queen Anne Lane; and my companion, subsiding into her normal condition of impassive abstraction, opened the side-door with her latch-key, and we entered the music-room together.

CHAPTER II.

TWO PROPOSALS.

A COMBINED rehearsal of some portion of the opera and decoration of the stage was evidently in full swing. At one end of the room sat Maria, perched on a miniature scaffold and surrounded by paint-pots of distemper colours, brushes, stencil-frames, and other paraphernalia. Having twisted round her head some kind of silken turban, and thrown over her dress a pinafore or overall of light-blue material, she looked, if possible, more adorable than ever, working away at her task with a pretty busyness and enthusiasm. She was engaged in developing a bright-green perspective view of Mashiefield golf-links as the background for the second scene in the forthcoming production, and was so intent upon her work that she could only flourish a welcoming paint-brush at me as I approached.

"Sorry," she cried gaily. "Can't shake hands. I'm all painty. How does this strike you?" pointing to the landscape.

"It looks decidedly green," I ventured doubtfully.

"The ignorance and presumption of these critics!" she scoffed, "totally forgetful of the fact that this work of art is to be seen under strong artificial light. There! what do you think of it now?" and she tripped down to turn on an electric switch, throwing a bright-yellow glow on the canvas.

The effect was certainly remarkable. The green paint disappeared, and an undulating sward, fading away into grey, with the blue Forth and the hills of Fife in the distance, took its place.

"Wonderful, quite!" a well-known voice exclaimed;

and I turned, to discover the ubiquitous Pennifeather already ensconced in an arm-chair.

Christine O'Mara flashed at me one look of annoyance and disgust, and then marched away without a word, to take off her hat and cloak.

Meanwhile Maria skipped daintily to her perch again to continue her labours, while at the other end of the room sat Harry at the piano, trying, at intervals between shouts of hilarious laughter, to instil into dear old Robert Montgomery some idea of what was required of him in the character of the Macer. I never saw anything more delightful. The patient and serious earnestness with which Robert went through his ridiculous performance, receiving with deferential respect all the whimsical suggestions of his delighted coach, and embodying them, with conscientious deliberation, in song, speech, and gesture, was charming to behold. There was no scamping about Robert's performance. He had undertaken a certain piece of work, which must be done with all his characteristic thoroughness, conscientiousness, and method. Again and again he tottered and swaggered as directed, waved a spectral mace in the air, shouldered it, strutted, stood still, and sat down. I believe if Harry had instructed him to hop on one leg he would have done it—like a bird.

So far as I remember, the idiotic words that he was intoning—for singing it could not be called—while Harry banged out the tune on the piano, were something like these:—

I.

"I'm the man that carries the mace,
I've sent all the Judges to right about face,
For, in the procession, they can't keep their place,—
So they're off to the links in despair!
For the legal profession,
Drawn up in procession,
Looks dafter than any March hare!

II.

I'm the man the cases who call,
With shouts that reverberate loud through the hall,—
Without my permission it won't do at all

To attempt to address the Court.
For such freedom, you see,
You must come first to me,
The tribunal of primal resort !

III.

I'm the man whom the witnesses hate,
For I lock them all up, in their order to wait,
Till they're famished with hunger and cursing their fate ;—
Then I hurry them off to be sworn !
That's the usual hour
That their lunch I devour,
And I laugh their remonstance to scorn !

IV.

I'm the man that the advocates fear,
When I bellow their names, in tones strident but clear,—
They rush wildly forward the reason to hear,
And their language distinctly improper is,
When I tell them that they
Are requested to stay
And plead a cause *in forma pauperis* !”

“Now, you young tyrant,” cried Robert, out of breath and wiping his benevolent head, “is that right ? and will it do ?”

“My dear Robert,” Harry replied hysterically, lying back and wiping his eyes in turn, “I never saw or heard anything the least like it in my life. It is inimitable !”

“Let us have some more of it !” shouted Pennifeather from his arm-chair.

“Certainly not !” Robert exclaimed, shaking his fist at his late preceptor. “No power on earth shall make me repeat that gibberish until it is absolutely necessary ! At the same time,” he added, “I must get that mace drill right ;” and, seizing the poker from the fireplace, he proceeded to repeat the evolutions that had been taught him, with single-minded, unaffected, and all-engrossing seriousness.

“Caller-ow-oo !” trilled Maria from her perch, in the long-drawn minor cadence familiar to the dwellers in Edinburgh of those days. “I am improving in my

fisher-girl's call, am I not, Harry? Say I am, sir! I'd stamp my foot if I were not afraid of falling off!"

"Like the wit who refused to venture on an orange!" Harry grinned in reply.

Meantime Pennifeather was busily engaged in conning his part from a roll of manuscript.

"'This is simply an invaluable manual of short and easy phrases in the Scottish tongue,'" he quoted aloud. Then, closing his eyes and covering the script with his hand, he proceeded to repeat the sentence in an undertoned mumble-mumble.

"Go on, Mr Pennifeather!" cried Maria encouragingly, "I'll answer from here!"

"But I have not the nimble wit to learn my part in the space of a flash of lightning as you do!" Pennifeather protested. "Let me see now" (at his book again)—"'this is simply an invaluable' mumble-mumble."

"Put away that book and proceed!" cried Harry. "I'll prompt you. Come down, Maria, and go through the scene with him."

"Shan't!" exclaimed that wilful young person. "Too busy in this bee-yutiful bunker! I'll say it from here or not at all!"

Harry indulged in his favourite gesture of despair.

"Go on then, Pennifeather!" he exclaimed, with resignation: "you were at the 'invaluable production.'"

"Quite so," answered Pennifeather vaguely. "Let me see now"—glancing furtively at his book. "Why, that's right!" he shouted in joy; "that's what I ought to say, 'Let me see now!'—I *am* getting on! 'Let me see now!'"

Then reciting, he went on—

"'Kail means colewort. That's easy! But what in thunder is colewort? Never heard of it! Kailyard means a kitchen garden. How romantic! *There grows a bonnie brier-bush in our kailyard* signifies, *There grows a beautiful wild-rose tree in our kitchen garden!* Sounds a bit off, somehow! but poets always do lose by translation! Then, *Come, prie my mou', my cantie cal-lant!* means *Come, kiss me, dear boy!* What a lovely language!"

“‘Enter Helen, in her fisher-girl dress,’ that’s me!” Maria chanted from her station “high and aloof.” “Of course you fail to recognise me as your best beloved, Mr Pennifeather, simply because I am in fancy costume! How very like a play, Harry!”

“Pay no attention to the young scoffing person up aloft!” said Harry. “Go on, Pennifeather! you’re doing splendidly.”

But Pennifeather by this time was almost as much in earnest as Robert himself. Still reading from the “invaluable production,” he proceeded: “‘*Lassie, a young girl; bonnie lassie, a beautiful young girl.*’”

“Now,” cried Maria, gurgling once more, “you catch sight for the first time of my fair young form, and, without a notion of ever having set eyes on me before, you are struck dumb by my artless charm.”

“Yes,” Pennifeather acquiesced, keeping his finger on the place; “I look up and see you. Ha!”

“And I turn bashfully away,” Maria giggled.

Pennifeather (proceeding with his part). “‘Bonnie lassie—a beautiful young girl.’ And here is a very perfect specimen!”

Maria (shocked). “‘Oh, my!’”

Pennifeather (glancing at his book). “‘Certainly, oh, my! Quite so, oh yes! I mean, aye—ou, aye!’”

Maria (in tones of amazement). “‘What’s that?’”

Pennifeather. “‘Here’s another native that does not understand her own language! I observed—ahem!’” (with a great effort)—“‘aye! ou—aye!’”

Maria (understanding). “‘Ou, aye!’”

Pennifeather. “‘That’s what I said—ou, aye! This delightful tongue seems to consist principally of vowel sounds! Now, let us see!’” (consulting the “invaluable production”)—“‘ah, yes! Bonnie lassie!’”

Maria (ecstatically). “‘Ou, aye!’”

Pennifeather. “‘You understand that, at any rate!’” (at his book again). “‘Bonnie lassie, will ye gang to the Braes of Aberfeldy?’”

“Here,” said Maria, “I sigh contentedly and, laying my head on your manly shoulder, murmur ‘ou, aye!’”

Pennifeather (going on stolidly with his rôle).

“Well, I don’t know where to find the Braes, and should not recognise them if I did, so we shan’t go, in the meantime. Now, where’s that quotation about “dear boy”? Ah, here we are! If I were to say to you, “Come, prie my mou’, my cantie callant!” what would you say?”

Maria (languishingly), “‘Ou—aye!’”

“But, look here!” quoth Pennifeather, dashing down his book, and expostulating *in propria persona*, “it’s not a bit fair! You have absolutely nothing to learn! All you have to do is to repeat at intervals two letters of the alphabet!”

“But think of the infinite variety of intonation that I infuse into them!” cried *Maria*, gurgling again. “Now, do let us finish! I had no idea you were so word-perfect.”

“I should get more into the spirit of the thing if you would come down and act it,” Pennifeather suggested.

“*J’y suis, J’y reste!*” returned *Maria* teasingly.

“Oh, very well!” said Pennifeather, huffed; “where were we?—oh yes! ‘Well! why don’t you? If I were to say to you, “Will you permit me to prie your mou’, my cantie callantess?” what would you say?’”

Maria (resignedly). “‘A’ll alloo ye!’”

Pennifeather (in ecstasy). “‘Alleluia?’”—(smack)—“‘Amen!’”

“Now,” said *Maria*, “I turn upon you fiercely, when of course you recognise me, being accustomed, I suppose, to see me in that mood. Observe the fierceness!”

Maria (fiercely). “‘Now, sir! What have you to say for yourself?’”

Pennifeather (feebly). “‘Helen, is it you?’”

Maria. “‘Yes, it’s me!—I!—me! Bother! Which-ever it ought to be!’”

Pennifeather. “‘It’s I—ou, aye!’”

Maria. “‘Kissing a strange fisher-girl!’”

Pennifeather. “‘Pardon me, my darling! You are not a strange fisher-girl! And yet, I don’t know, you are a very strange fisher-girl!’ There! that’s all I’ve got!”

“For the very good reason,” said Harry, “that there is

no more of the scene written as yet; but it goes quite well, I think, eh?"

"Kind sir, I thank you for your courtesy," cried Maria, stepping down at last; "I have heard of girls who enjoyed being set upon a pinnacle and worshipped, but it is a trying and cramping experience!"

I was conceited enough to believe that she was really too shy to rehearse even that burlesque love-scene before others, and so had remained out of reach. Perhaps I was only a self-satisfied young jackass—so difficult is it to recall and appraise the feelings and emotions of the days of one's callow youth—but, for some time, I had begun to believe that there was a certain subtle distinction between her manner when with me and the frank and friendly tone of her intercourse with others. The refined accomplishments of our companions I was not happy enough to possess, and a certain *gauche* self-consciousness prevented me from endeavouring to conquer my natural disability. Unlike dear old Robert, I could not—or did not—overcome my constitutional diffidence, nor did I bestir myself to join in the general light-hearted frivolity. Perhaps it was this incompatibility with the pervading tone of joyousness that caused Maria, when in my company, to adopt a graver and less ardently vivacious demeanour.

"My mood of mind," she once said to me, "is essentially dramatic. Like the dyer's hand, it is subdued to what it works in. That is the reason why I am so staid with Robert, so volatile with Harry, and——"

"And with me?" I prompted.

"With you," she answered, in smiling confusion, "I am not quite myself! There! Make the most of that!"

When she descended from the dais, at the conclusion of the rehearsal of the unfinished scene with Pennifeather, she made her way to the dark corner where I was sitting, and sank down, with a sigh, upon the couch by my side.

"Lucky Hamish!" she exclaimed; "you play the part of a looker-on!"

"And, therefore, see most of the game," I returned,

"though it does not seem much of a game to you. You look worn out!"

"Oh! I am so tired—so tired!" she answered wearily.

"You try yourself too much," I answered; "why not rest now and then?"

"I am a troubled spirit!" she said, half wistfully. "And yet how ungrateful it must appear, now that my father is recovering so rapidly! Mr Poole has been with him to-day, and seems to have done more good than all the doctors have accomplished. I should indeed be happy! and yet——" and she hung her head again, listlessly and despondently.

I glanced rapidly around. Harry and Pennifeather were at the piano, trying some song with patient persistence. Miss M'Skimming and Proudly, who had just arrived, were talking to Christine; and Robert was still cogitating his words, and performing solemn evolutions with the poker. We were distant from them by the whole length of the room, visible only as shadows. Here was my blessed opportunity!

Moistening my lips, which had somehow become parched and dry, I murmured in her ear—

"Maria, dear Maria, I received your message!"

"My message?" she faltered.

"From Robert. Your love—your dear love, was it not? He says that he thinks you meant it, and I have come to ask if it is true?"

She looked up at me from under her long lashes, as she murmured in reply—

"Would it matter very much to you if it were?"

"You know that it would," I urged in tones of suppressed but passionate eagerness. "You know that I love you, have always loved you—and can never be happy except at your side. Come to me to protect and cherish you, and let us rest and be happy together!"

It was, as she afterwards told me with merry laughter in her eyes, the very clumsiest and most halting proposal that ever was made. The surroundings and the potential audience were somewhat embarrassing, and hardly favourable to flights of eloquent and fervid speech. But, halting and clumsy as it was, somehow it did not

seem displeasing to her. She was not offended, nor did she rise to go away. That was some comfort!

For moments, that seemed ages to me, she sat with downcast eyes and drooping head; then, timidly and gently, she yielded her dear hand to mine, and looking in my eyes with a certain trustful wonder, she whispered—

“Hamish! Are you asking me to marry you?”

“I love you! I love you—dearest and best of women,” I repeated passionately.

She answered the grasp of my hand that held hers with the slightest of pressures, sitting, meanwhile, silent and very thoughtful by my side.

“This is all real and true?” she whispered suddenly, turning towards me. “It is not a dream! You ask me, of your own free will, to marry you?”

I did not pause then to consider the strangeness of the question, though afterwards I pondered over it often enough.

“Do you think that I, or any man, would need a spur to such an ambition?” I protested.

“And you really love me, Hamish?” she whispered again—“really and truly me, just as I am? for I am afraid, dear heart, that I shall never change.”

“I would not have you change!” I replied. “To me you are *the* woman, the only woman that ever was or ever can be!”

She sat quite still once more, for a time.

Then simply and graciously she gave me her answer.

“I love you, Hamish,” she said, and the quick blood surged into her fair young face and ebbed away again, leaving her very pale, while her dear eyes shone upon me like twin stars. “I think I have always loved you from the day I sang Harry’s ‘Song of Circe’ and saw you for the first time listening here!”

“’Twas then I fell in love with you, my dear, my dear!” I answered; “I bless the song!”

“I bless the song!” she echoed. “I have never sung it since, and never shall again, except to you, my Hamish, my man!”

Ah! false as dicers’ oaths are lovers’ vows!

"Why should I pretend to deny that I have longed and prayed for this moment?" she went on earnestly, her hand upon her breast. "Hamish, you are strong and steadfast, the shadow of a great rock—and I—I am in a weary land!"

"Maria!" shouted Harry at that moment from the other end of the room—and, for the first and only time in my life, I wished him in perdition—"Mari-a! Where are you? I have just finished three verses of your duet with Pennifeather. Come and let us hear how it sounds!"

Instantly, her unusual mood of grave and sombre earnestness disappeared, and, bounding lightly across the room, she reached the others, where she was soon bending over the piano, beaming with appreciative delight, as she read the new verses that had just been composed.

As I sat still where she had left me, stunned with happiness—for was not this incomparable being mine? mine! Her own sweet lips had confessed it! Christine, who had never cast a glance in our direction since she entered the room, made some excuse for coming across to me.

"I congratulate you," she murmured as she went by. "You have won a wife! I commiserate you: you have lost a friend!"

Suddenly and strangely depressed by these ominous words, I continued to gaze at the group by the platform. All traces of her recent emotion had vanished from my darling's face, and she was speaking eagerly, with her usual alert and intense dramatic gestures, to the two men beside her, every now and then appealing to Honoria M'Skimming and Proudly, who were looking on. And there was Harry, gazing up in her face with boyish, whole-hearted, frank admiration, striking tentative chords on the instrument the while, and trying over inchoate melodies. Certainly these two seemed the typical embodiment of that sexless intimate companionship which so often animates brother-and-sister artists. Could it be that Christine's instincts were terribly accurate, and that I was to gain the desire of my eyes only at the price of my dear boy's broken heart?

"You are all in love with her, and will fly at each other's throats," she had said. Bah! After all, Christine was only a foolish, inexperienced girl! Men of the world do not behave like the heroes of the stories that women love!

Comforting myself with such reflections, I rose to join the others. Not a glance did my darling vouchsafe me as I approached. Avoiding my eye altogether, she thrust a copy of the new verses into Pennifeather's hand, and took up a position behind the piano, her hand resting on Harry's shoulder.

"This duet," said Harry, "finishes your scene together. Maria asks the meaning of the 'invaluable manual' in Pennifeather's hand. He shows her the book, and this is what they sing. Now, Pennifeather!"

Then Pennifeather piped up, in a sweet enough tenor voice—

"O, my love is like a red red rose,—
 She is also but a lassie, O!
 And dinna forget to Scotland yet,
 In a cup that's called a tassie, O!
 You always 'croon' when you hum in tune
 That Mary's kind and couthy, O!
 And in Kyle was born John Barleycorn,
 Who grew thirsty—or rather drouthy, O!"

And together they joined in the duet:—

"Then sing to us the auld Scotch sangs,
 They're all about Prince Charlie, O!
 And the land o' cakes (*she*) oh my! (*he*) guid sakes!
 And the wind that shakes the barley, O!"

"Now," said Harry, "you are supposed to turn pages together, and sing alternate lines. Go ahead!"
 Then followed this extravagant medley:—

She. "O Doune has bonnie banks and braes,"
He. "And doon the burn goes David, O!"
She. "And Scotland's dales and Scotland's vales——"
He. "May whistle o'er the lave o'd, O!"
She. "The boat rocks at the pier o' Leith,"
He. "And I maun leave my Nannie, O!"
She. "In song we'll praise Maxwellton braes,"
He. "And bonnie Laurie Annie, O!"

Duet. "Then sing to us the auld Scotch sangs,
 Blue hills and purple heather, O !
 And Craigielea (*she*) well, there ! (*he*) dear me !
 We'll all turn Scotch together, O !"

Then Maria had a verse to herself :—

" By lessons long, you learn in song,
 My ain kind dearie, O !
 This Scottish land you'll understand,
 From Berwick to Balwearie, O !
 Then shout again for Laird Cockpen,
 And Duncan Gray's braw wooin', O !
 Sing, as you smile, ' Within a mile,'
 And bring the sense to ruin, O !"

And they finished together :—

Duet. "So sing to us the auld Scotch sangs :
 In England they're the thing, you know !
 But we confess (*she*) too true ! (*he*) nae less !
 They're precious hard to sing, you know !"

The arch drollery of the scene was irresistible. Maria delivered her lines with just sufficient appreciation of their daring sarcasm, which Pennifeather's semi-comprehending bewilderment rendered all the more effective by force of contrast. Harry shook hands enthusiastically with both when it was over. Robert leant on his poker, as the emigrant soldier did on his sword, and wiped away a tear of intense enjoyment. Miss M'Skimming was all smiles; and even Horatio Proudly chuckled to himself as he repeated in a rumbling undertone—

" " In song we'll praise Maxwellton braes
 And bonnie Laurie Annie, O ! "

" What a perfect specimen of the hysteron-proteron ! "

But with these energetic young people there was no time to waste. Harry was once more seated at the piano, and Maria and Christine were already busy at sheets of music-paper, when suddenly and unexpectedly the panel of the lift flew open, and, to our amazement, there emerged with a shout which I can only describe as a triumphant roar, the figure of Mr Christopher

Langworthy himself, seated in a wheeled chair, which he swiftly and dexterously propelled into the middle of the room. He was dressed in a flowing gown, with a white loose collar wide open at the neck, and over his knees was a costly fur robe. His head was thrown back, his lips were parted in a beaming smile, and his great grey eyes—Maria's eyes—glanced quizzically from one of us to another, as he skilfully guided his carriage over the polished floor.

There was sudden dead silence as we all rose to our feet. Christine stood motionless and mute, glancing swiftly and warily from Pennifeather to Harry and back again. After his first start of surprise Robert also continued to gaze upon Pennifeather's face, whose expression, I am bound to say, betrayed nothing but a certain polite and pleased interest. At that instant I noticed Harry grow pale to the lips as he encountered the flashing eyes of the man in the chair, and then draw back. As for myself, my first sensation was one of infinite relief. It was simply incredible that that fine-looking, open-faced gentleman could be anything but the straightforward honest man he seemed. This was no furtive, self-seeking impostor! This was a real man, worthy to be the father of my darling!

With a choking cry of childlike pleasure and love she ran swiftly across the floor, and sank down beside the chair.

CHAPTER III.

MR LANGWORTHY APPEARS IN A NEW CHARACTER.

ROBERT was the first to break the astonished silence.

"This is indeed a pleasant surprise, sir," he said.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the invalid, "you do look scared, all of you! I thought I should give you a fright. The watchful Parker has an afternoon off. Maria had deserted me. Even Christine was not on guard. My new chair had arrived; and the temptation was irresistible. Do not scold me, Maria, or I shall cry! Introduce me to your friends, or my embarrassment will overwhelm me!" and he beamed upon us all once again.

She rose with a pretty air of confusion, and turning towards me, said softly—

"First, this is Hamish!"

"Hamish?" he echoed, lifting his eyebrows.

"My name is Stuart," I said, holding out my hand.

He took it in a firm clasp.

"Hamish Stuart!" he repeated. "A great name, if ominous! Let us hope that he will never flee from his own kingdom! So he is first, is he?" smiling, and turning to Maria.

"Robert, of course, you know," she said hurriedly, and blushing divinely.

"Robert and I have met," he assented. "You are glad to see me here, I hope, after the woeful plight in which you found me the other day?"

"You certainly have improved in spirits at least," Robert replied.

"And in pocket, my dear boy!" he shouted. "There

is no cure for depression like the gratification of the good old gentlemanly vice of avarice! Your friends the railway company have knuckled down, and paid up."

"That is good hearing," said Robert heartily. "I trust they have made a satisfactory settlement?"

"Not half enough!" he laughed again; "but Poole insisted that I should take what I could get. I did so; and from that moment I proceeded hypocritically to recover."

"Don't believe a word of it!" cried Maria. "Whatever he received has been paid away already, I am certain. Now confess!" and she held up an admonitory finger.

"Not at all!" he responded, "not a penny! At least not quite——"

"There!" she exclaimed triumphantly, "not less than two-thirds, I know! He always gives away two-thirds of everything he receives—extravagant parent!"

"Well, not *more* than two-thirds," he agreed hastily. "But, my dear, you have not yet presented me to the rest of the assembled members of your company."

"How stupid of me!" said Maria, "but you confuse me so! This is Honoria M'Skimming, my dearest friend."

He bowed as he took her hand.

" 'Friendship, mysterious cement of the soul,
Sweetener of life, and solder of society!'"

he quoted gallantly. "I like your look, if you will pardon an old man's familiarity, Miss M'Skimming. In the evil days which may come, Maria's need of true friendship may be great!"

"Maria, at least," replied Honoria, in some astonishment, "will never want for troops of friends."

"Idlers, hangers-on, and sycophants, perhaps," he muttered moodily.

"Is not that rather a scathing indictment of us all?" I ventured.

"Whom the cap fits let him wear it," he answered,

smiling again and spreading wide his arms, "but the words of Gay contain eternal truth—

" ' Friendship, like love, is but a name,
Unless to one you stint the flame.' "

"My father—Mr Proudly," said Maria, going on with her introductions.

"The rising counsel!" exclaimed her father, bowing again with exaggerated deference. "I have heard of your command of language, worthy counsellor!"

Touched on his weakest spot, Proudly found himself for once unusually inarticulate.

"See to it," the invalid continued significantly, "that language does not get the command of you!"

"And this is Mr Pennifeather, father," Maria continued, presenting that gentleman.

Robert must have been on tenter-hooks, and I know that I was almost feverishly excited.

For a moment they eyed each other like wary wrestlers. Then Mr Langworthy's face cleared, and he offered his hand.

"The expectant English explorer into Scottish men and manners, is it not?" he interrogated. "I have heard your praises sung by Maria, Mr Pennifeather, and am glad to greet a brother-student of humanity."

Pennifeather bowed with calm composure and politeness.

"You seem almost disappointed?" Mr Langworthy continued, looking slightly puzzled.

"Pleasantly disappointed," the other returned, "and relieved."

"Relieved?"

"I had half expected to meet in Mr Langworthy a former acquaintance."

"And you are pleasantly disappointed to find yourself mistaken! Then we may all assume"—and he looked round with a roguish twinkle—"that the man you expected is not a *persona grata*!"

"So that is the reason," Maria struck in, "why you behaved so oddly about the photograph the other day, Mr Pennifeather!"

"What photograph?" her father asked abruptly.

"This," answered Maria, carrying the now restored likeness and frame to him.

"This, however," he said, after a momentary glance, and tapping it with his finger, "is not a photograph of me, but of my brother James."

"Oh, daddy!" Maria cried. "You gave it me yourself, when you were home three years ago!"

He laughed lightly as he patted her cheek.

"You took it, my child, from among my papers, don't you remember? As matter of fact, James, with whom I was not then on the best of terms, had just sent it to me; and as I had never even told you of his existence, explanations were impossible. So I left you in your error; but it is a speaking likeness of James, all the same!"

And he nodded, almost mockingly, in the direction of Pennifeather, as who would say, "There! make the best of that!"

Then he handed the picture to him, asking with seeming interest—

"Did you know the original of this, Mr Pennifeather?"

"I think that I met him once," Pennifeather replied, replacing it on the mantelpiece.

"A sad rogue, I am afraid—a sad rogue; but as much sinned against as sinning! You and I must have some further talk on this subject, Mr Pennifeather! But, come!" he continued, more brightly, "I have not yet met the poet, author, musician, Mr Haviland!"

Slowly, almost painfully, Harry came forward.

"Good God!" cried Mr Langworthy, catching sight of him, and seizing him by both arms, "it is the face, the man in the train, whose eyes met mine at that supreme moment!"

With difficulty my dear boy's lips framed the words—

"Yes! I am the man."

"And has the scene haunted you, as it has me, ever since?"

"I have never ceased to remember that moment."

Relaxing his grip, Mr Langworthy sat back in his

chair, his head sunk on his breast, his eyes glassy and introspective.

"It happened in a flash," he murmured slowly. "A sudden jolt, and the heavy despatch-box fell from the rack on my brother's neck. In a moment I had him in my arms, and, raising my eyes towards the window, I saw a white face peering in—yours! Then came the crash, and—oblivion!"

"But," said Harry after a pause, "what of the lady?"

"The lady?" Mr Langworthy echoed, looking up vacantly.

"The woman with glorious golden-red hair, sitting opposite——"

"Ah, yes! I remember," said Mr Langworthy. "Poor woman, I wonder who she was and what became of her! She got in at Peterborough or some other station. I did not speak to her. But let us forget these horrors," he resumed more cheerfully, "and talk about you! That is the pet theme of all artist, musician scribblers, is it not?"

"I have never done anything worth talking about," returned Harry, having by this time recovered his composure.

"Not yet, not yet, I grant!" the other assented.

"Oh, dad! how can you say so?" protested Maria; "all that Harry does is clever."

"Clever!" laughed her father. "Look at him! Do you think he aspires only to be clever? Be ambitious, Haviland, and never be ashamed of being so. Doubtless, by that sin fell the angels, but that was because their ambition aspired to the unachievable. Write, revise, and correct 'as if the Stagirite o'erlooked each line,' as many a better man has done! Why, three of the best, and best-known lines in 'Marmion' are, each of them, the result of an afterthought. Then you may some day perhaps produce something better than nonsense verses, however clever they may be!"

Harry accepted this patronising advice quite modestly and in good part.

"Make things big!" the invalid continued. "Embrace with a wide grasp, take the broad view! The stuff is in you; don't fritter your talent to shreds!"

“‘I had rather be a kitten and cry mew
Than one of these same metre ballad-mongers!’”

“The great advantage we women have over men,” said Maria sententiously, “is that we may occupy ourselves with small things without being disgraced.”

“Maria,” her father retorted, “thou art either a wise woman, with wisdom beyond thy years, or a rank plagiarist, or both! Robert is a man of letters; he will quote your author.”

“It sounds to me like Dr Johnson,” replied Robert.

“It *is* Dr Johnson, and he adds, if I mistake not, that the only little thing a man may take up without disgracing himself is fiddling.”

“Which shows all the pretentious old ass knew,” Harry protested warmly. “Imagine the supreme ignorance and insolence that would rank fiddling as a little thing!”

“Then you play the fiddle also!” cried Mr Langworthy, holding up his hands. “The man with ten talents and dissipated energies! Even Dr Johnson acknowledged that, if he had learned to fiddle, he would have done nothing else.”

“I am afraid,” said Harry, “that I am only a superficial philanderer!”

“Now I like that!” the invalid responded. “There is hope for the man who combines modesty with accomplishment. Is your fiddle here?”

Harry brought the violin, and put it in his hands.

He fondled the instrument lovingly, touching the strings with his finger-tips as he pressed the glossy back to his cheek and then ran his eye over it, with the air of a connoisseur.

“A Nicolas Amati, I see!” he said. “There is no mistaking the lines and the curves of the scroll. And a beautifully balanced bow made by Tubbs! You are in luck, young man!”

“Won’t you play something, sir?” cried Harry eagerly.

“I have not passed a bow across the strings for—I shall not say how long,” he replied regretfully, placing the violin, almost unconsciously, under his chin; “but

take my advice once more. As in literature, so in music—even in fiddling—keep things big! Can any one here play me the piano part of a Beethoven piano-and-violin sonata?"

No one moved, and Maria and Harry mournfully shook their heads.

"Christine!" he said quietly, without looking up, "you can, I am sure!"

She gave him one startled, almost shocked, look.

"If you think it wise," was all she said, as she walked to the piano, while Harry hunted out a book of music, which he placed before her.

Mr Langworthy shook his head in disapproval.

"No one can play," he said, "whose attention is riveted on reading the notes!"

Christine looked round mutinously.

"You credit me with a familiarity with Beethoven which I do not possess," she remarked icily. "Which is it to be—the Kreutzer?"

"No!" he shouted in consternation, real or affected. "In my present state of health the Kreutzer would kill me! Take the one before, in G."

Then they launched out upon a glorious stream of melody, laughing, dancing, sprightly, trilling cadences, instrument answering to instrument, and combining in the sweetest of harmonies. As a mere effort of memory and manual dexterity the performance appeared marvellous; but I despair of being able to give any technical description of it. There were three movements, first the opening, dance-like, rhythmic melody; then a slow, soft, whispering minuet, with two interwoven themes taken up in turn, now by the liquid tones of the piano, and now by the silken vibrations of the sweet-singing Amati.

"Now for the *allegro vivace*!" cried the violinist, when the last strains of the minuet had died softly away. "Stand by, Haviland, for I am afraid that I may not stay the course!"

Off they dashed into the rapid staccato tuneful finale. Technical difficulties did not seem to exist for the fiddler, and Christine, though rather mechanically per-

haps, threaded her way through runs and changes of key with absolute accuracy and unfailing skill.

"Ah! I am done! I can go no further," cried the invalid as he paused for a moment. "Finish it, Haviland!"

Harry snatched his beloved fiddle from the other's hands, and, picking up the passage where he had left off, continued to the end of the sonata in very creditable style.

"That," said Maria, with a deep sigh of satisfaction, "was simply glorious! And to think that I never even knew that you could play, daddy!"

"There are more things in heaven and earth," he laughed good-naturedly. "Now you know from whom you inherited your love of music."

"You are a marvellous pianist, Christine," said Harry, going over to her.

She touched the keys lightly, without looking up.

"It was clever of you," she answered, with the slightest possible emphasis on the word, "to pick me up when Mr Langworthy could not finish."

"I wonder what caused him to break down," said Harry.

"I wonder!" she echoed, looking round.

"I never could master that modulation into E flat," Mr Langworthy apologised.

"You surely don't expect me to believe that!" scoffed Harry. "You *are* a master, sir!"

"Perhaps I wanted to see if *you* could master it!" the other suggested, laughing again.

"That is much more probable," answered Harry drily.

"Are you a musician, Mr Pennifeather!" inquired Mr Langworthy suddenly.

"I am not," replied that gentleman, "but I can appreciate a masterpiece when I hear it."

"Then," said Mr Langworthy, "you should have heard my brother James play! He really was a fiddler!"

"Indeed? Did he play that sonata?"

"All fiddlers do. Do you know it?"

"I have heard it once before," said Pennifeather, "and under somewhat curious circumstances."

"And who were the performers?"

"It was played by the notorious Signor Merelli and a lady, in his house in Mayfair, on the night when the house was raided by the police as a gambling-hell," returned Pennifeather.

"Oh, what a shocking place to frequent!" cried Maria. "And what were you doing there, Mr Pennifeather? Were you on the side of the police or the gamblers?"

"I was a friendly neutral," Pennifeather replied.

"And what was the result of the raid?" asked Robert.

"That also was neutral, or, rather, nugatory. They bagged the pigeons, but the crows escaped."

"You mean?" Maria interrogated.

"Merelli and the fair piano-player disappeared and were never heard of again."

"And how was that managed?" asked Mr Langworthy, who had listened to this revelation with a troubled face.

"I think the police afterwards discovered some system of concealed electric lifts and secret doors," Pennifeather answered carelessly; "but, as is usual when they fail, they kept their own counsel."

"Well, if they played half as nicely as Christine and dad," exclaimed Maria, "I am glad the poor things did escape!"

"I have heard of the man Merelli," Mr Langworthy said thoughtfully; "he was said to be a divine performer, especially when inspired by champagne."

"I heard that it was drugs," said Pennifeather.

At this point Christine, plain and ungainly, limped across the room, carrying to a cabinet a bundle of music.

"How dreadful!" Maria put in again. "What was the lady like, Mr Pennifeather?"

Unconsciously he followed with his eyes the moving contrast presented by Christine as he replied—

"She was a striking-looking young woman, with an unforgettable face. How the pair were never found again is a mystery, unless they are both dead. She had glorious red-gold hair, curled close about the temples,

and barely reaching to her shoulders in a thick wavy mass."

Christine finished putting away the music, and, rising, whispered a few words to Mr Langworthy.

"Certainly!" he answered aloud, "a breath of fresh air will revive you."

And, with a cold bow all round, Christine left the room.

"Mr Pennifeather," said Mr Langworthy earnestly, after an interval, "I know something of the man Merelli, and let me advise you, if he is still alive, to avoid him. He is strong and dangerous. I do not envy the man who endeavours to thwart or interfere with him."

"Mr Merelli," Pennifeather returned with a shrug, "never did me any harm. I have really no interest in him."

"That's good!" said the other; "but don't neglect my warning, should you ever cross his path. As to this matter about my brother James, you have excited my curiosity. Come to see me alone to-morrow, and we shall go into it."

"I am sorry, but I leave for London to-night," replied Pennifeather.

"You do!" cried Mr Langworthy. "Lucky man! Then *au revoir!* Come to see me on your return, that is, if you are returning."

"Of course he is returning, dad," said Maria; "we could not possibly perform Harry's opera without him."

"Then come and see me when you do," Mr Langworthy repeated. "And now, Maria," he continued, "the play being over and the resuscitated parent duly exhibited, I must ask you to be good enough to ring for Parker and the lift."

As she tripped across to do so, he wheeled his chair in the direction of the sliding panel. Then, turning back, he said, glancing sideways in the direction of Pennifeather—

"Robert! you will be glad to hear that the Midlothian Bank has paid me the amount of that forged cheque!"

“And Mr Stuart,” he added, “or Hamish, as I suppose I must learn to call you, if you have anything of interest to say to me, I shall be glad to see you upstairs to-morrow at quarter-past four. What? Parker gone out again and Christine off duty? What luck!”

Waving his hand merrily to us all, he wheeled his chair inside the opening, and the lift ascended, carrying Maria along with him to the next floor.

CHAPTER IV.

MR PENNIFEATHER REVIEWS THE SITUATION, AND
SUSTAINS AN ATTACK.

Two days later, I received from Pennifeather the following letter, dated from his club in Charles Street, St James's:—

“MY DEAR STUART,—After our eventful yesterday, I caught the London express from the Waverley Station last night, and for the reasons that I shall explain thought it better to come on here rather than disembark at the scene of the railway accident, as I had intended. I heard the man in Queen Anne Square make an appointment with you for to-day, but was afraid—literally and truly afraid—to communicate with you before leaving Edinburgh. I trust that I am not now too late to put you further on your guard.

“The man is James Langworthy, *alias* Allen Aylesbury. Of that I am morally certain; and I have a shrewd suspicion that he is the notorious Antonio Merelli as well. If I am right, his conduct yesterday was more than mere bluff; it was a distinct intimation of menace and war to the knife. Of course he knows me quite well. He was intimate with me when he posed as Aylesbury in Wakefield, and if he is also Merelli he had previously encountered me in his gambling-house in Mayfair. One thing is certain, namely, that before we met yesterday he was suggesting to old Poole that my visits should be discouraged.

“You heard how he greeted me and how I responded. I said I was relieved to find that I did not know him.

He played up at once by answering just as Christopher should answer; but it appeared to me that he was on his guard, and distinctly put out over the photograph incident. Miss Maria let him understand that I had been rather curious about it, and he at once made the ingenious explanation which you heard as to its being a likeness of his brother James. He no doubt remembered having given it to Christopher, and when Maria gave him a lead, out came this hastily concocted story.

"Then followed the incident of the sonata. Did not the whole thing strike you as amazing? No man can play like that who has not devoted days and nights for many years to the study; and yet his daughter—at least the lady whom he claims as his daughter—did not even know that her father could play at all. Is that credible? I believe she is right. The busy merchant Christopher can never have had time to devote to deep study of the violin; but this man is a master of the instrument, a fact which he proclaimed almost insolently by getting Haviland to conclude the third movement. The contrast between the finished professional and even the most advanced amateur was almost ludicrous.

"Now what was the object of this exhibition? It is true he dragged in by the ears a statement that his brother James was a much finer performer than he; but that is simply incredible. Ask Haviland. There are not five men alive who could best yesterday's rendering, in method, feeling, and execution. I may be unduly suspicious, but taken in conjunction with his subsequent warning it appeared to me that he intended to let me know that he really is Merelli, and is confident that he can fight me. That sonata invariably concluded the concerts in Mayfair, and was the prelude to the gaming-tables being brought out.

"Christine O'Mara can read at sight, but in feeling and temperament she certainly did not come anywhere near the woman who accompanied him in the London house. If we could find that woman we should hold the key to the mystery in our hands. You remember that I described her as the possessor of a wonderful profusion of red-gold hair and the woman in the train, as described

by Haviland, was similarly adorned. Is that merely a coincidence? We know from the newspapers that the woman in the train survived the accident; and it is now my firm intention to find her.

"All this may sound far-fetched and wire-drawn to your practical common-sense; but it is my business (1) to recover my £5000 filched from me in Wakefield, (2) to relieve the anxieties of the teller in Rigby's Bank and the manager of the insurance office in London, (3) to recover for the Midlothian Bank that £10,000 contained in the forged cheque negotiated through the Northshore; and no veiled threats by Mr James Langworthy-Aylesbury-Merelli are going to choke me off.

"Now as to my reason for coming to London.

"When I left Queen Anne Square house by the side door yesterday, I took, as my habit is, a short cut past St Asaph's Church, to reach Queenferry Road for my usual walk. A little Irish imp of mischief who sells newspapers there was standing in a dark corner.

"‘Hullo, Mike!’ I said, ‘you are earlier than usual.’

"In a moment he had sprung at me savagely. I saw the flash of a knife and instinctively raised my arm to ward off the blow. He turned and fled down the lane, and before I could get near him had shinned over a back wall and disappeared. My coat sleeve and shirt had been ripped open, but fortunately the skin was not even grazed. I looked about for a policeman, but finding none, went for my walk. On my return, there was Mike in his corner, grinning as if nothing had happened!

"‘Now, you young devil!’ I cried, seizing him firmly by the collar, ‘what do you mean by it? Look at my sleeve!’

"‘Ow!’ Mike howled, ‘you lemme go! See? I never done nothin’!’

"‘Never done nothin’!’ I repeated angrily, ‘didn’t you fly at me here with a knife in your hand not half an hour ago?’

"Mike ceased his howling in an instant, and regarded me with goggle-eyed astonishment.

"‘Me!’ he reiterated; ‘sure, I niver seen ye this blessed day till this blessed minute, swelp me!’

"The boy seemed so sincerely surprised that I was rather taken aback.

" 'Do you mean to tell me,' I said, 'that you were not here when I emerged from the lane?'

" 'Struth I were not!' he returned earnestly, drying his tears. 'What 'ud I want to knife you fur? A cove, he came and give me a bob to take a letter to No 4 Palace Street, an' I've on'y just got back!'

" 'Are you telling the truth?' I asked again.

" 'I got nothin' to lie about,' he answered stoutly; 'a cove with a white muffler and a greasy cap, 'e came out of the lane, an' 'e says to me, "Do you want to earn a bob?" says 'e. "What do you think?" says I. "You're English, an't you?" says 'e. "Irish, you bet!" says I. "Then," says 'e, "take this letter sharp to No. 4 Palace Street, and there's a bob for you!" and that's all about it.'

" 'Would you know this man again?' I asked.

" 'You bet!' he grinned again.

" 'Then here is another bob, and if ever you see him follow him, and let me know at the Megatherium where he goes!'

"Now No. 4 Palace Street, as you know, is the office of our friend Poole. His manner was 'on the north side of freendly,' as Bailie Nicol Jarvie remarks, when I went to interview him, and stated that my business was to discover whether he had received a letter by messenger some fifteen minutes previously.

" 'I did,' he replied loftily, 'and let me tell you, sir,' he added, growing very red and angry, 'that if this is intended as a practical joke, we are not used to such tomfoolery in this country!'

"The envelope had contained only a blank piece of paper!

"It was therefore obvious that the message had been a mere subterfuge to get Mike out of the way, while an attack was to be made on me by some one got up to represent him. This looked so exceedingly sinister that I took the precaution of cutting out the parts of the sleeve and shirt through which the knife had penetrated

and sending them to the police for analysis, with what result I do not yet know.

"I despatched a messenger to secure me a sleeping berth in the train, if possible one of the latest pattern, with doors that lock. Purposely I arrived at the station at the last minute, and as I dashed into my carriage and looked out on the platform, I could swear that I caught sight of my elusive little Wakefield friend, the weeping joyful Christian, in company with a man wearing a white muffler and greasy cap, watching the train move out of the station.

"I am, yours ever,

"CHARLES PENNIFEATHER."

On the day prior to my receipt of this letter, however, certain important events had happened, which will be duly chronicled in the succeeding chapter.

CHAPTER V.

THE PATERNAL SOLICITUDE OF MR LANGWORTHY.

How I got through my work in Court on the day following our first interchange of vows of mutual love I know not. Bound as I was in the chains of that most "subtle master under heaven, the maiden passion for a maid," I lived in a lover's dream of

"High thoughts and amiable words,
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,
And love of truth, and all that makes a man."

But the longest day draws to evening at last, and four o'clock found me on the doorstep of the house in Queen Anne Square. A friendly servant ushered me into the music-room; and there, a vision of radiant and blushing beauty, was my darling, newly risen from the chair on which she had been reclining, dressed in a soft, clinging, creamy white gown, a single red rose at her throat, her wistful eyes gazing shyly but happily into mine. For a moment or two we stood thus, mute. Then I held out my arms, and with a little laugh and a long, low, contented sigh, she swayed towards me and nestled to my breast. Ah! youth, youth! Glorious, rapturous youth and love! Even now, when I look back on that moment of ecstasy, through the long vista of intervening years, now that "late old age my head has silvered o'er, and my slow pulses dance with joy no more," I feel again the fluttering little heart beating against my own, the tender pressure of the dear hand, the sweet kiss of her fresh young lips—and my eyes grow misty with tears, while a sob rises in my throat.

How often in days to come did I cry aloud, in my agony of disillusion and despair, "Would God that our first embrace had been our last, and we had died in that moment of innocent bliss!" But there was no cloud on her fair young face that day, no shadow of impending evil and coming estrangement. Silently she clung to me, clasping me in a "meek embrace," while all the time she murmured my name softly and tenderly, "Hamish! Hamish!"

Then, hand in hand, we sat down together on a couch facing the fireplace.

"And when shall we be married, dearest?" I asked at length.

She was holding up the hand on the fourth finger of which I had slipped a ring, and admiring the sparkle and flash of the gems in the glow of the fire, with the simple delight of a child.

"Oh, Hamish!" she exclaimed, impulsively kissing the ring—a distinct waste of the raw material!—"you extravagant boy, it is simply lovely!"

"Not 'vivid'?" I asked, smiling.

She became grave in a moment.

"Of course," she said, "I must give up all our old play-words and frivolous make-believe."

"Of course you shall do nothing of the sort. You must never think of such a thing!" I answered ardently. "Heaven knows I am staid and severe enough for two! You said you would never change, and I would not have you try."

She made a queer little grimace, and then gave me her hand.

"Then, that is our bargain!" she cried. "I, Maria, of the light heart and merry moods and propensities, shall take you, Hamish, the sedate, solemn, and staid, from some day forward——"

"Yes, young person!" I interrupted, laughing, "but what day? You have not answered that important question yet."

Suddenly, to my surprise, the mischievous smile faded from her face, her eyes grew troubled, her lip quivered, and, bending down her head on my shoulder, she wept

for a time silently, while shuddering sobs seemed to shake her whole body as she nestled to my side.

"Maria! my darling Maria!" I cried in great distress. "Look up! What is the matter? What have I said, or done——?"

Her arms crept round my neck once more, and gradually she became calmer.

"Any day! Any day!" she sobbed at length. "Oh, Hamish, take me away soon from this dreadful, terrible house!"

The change in her mood was so swift and the request so unexpected, that I could do nothing but hold her in my arms, trying to soothe and comfort her, like a child.

"It terrifies me," she whispered between her sobs; "I am frightened, and"—with a half-hysterical little laugh—"I don't know what I am frightened about."

"But I thought you were so happy here!" I blurted out.

"Happy!" she cried, growing calmer and wiping her eyes. "I ought to be, should I not, with everything that the heart could desire supplied with lavish hands? But it is all so different, Hamish—so different from what I expected!" and she stretched out her arms with a despondent gesture.

"Different!" I echoed, in puzzled wonder. "Your father——"

"Is all to me that he ever was—just the same kind, dear old dad. Never think otherwise, Hamish. But, as he says, we are too like each other, with the same moods of exaltation and despondency. When I am with him, fond as I am of him and he of me, we do not help each other much; and somehow I miss the old, grave, playful tenderness with which he used to surround me. He seems positively alarmed lest I should grow to resemble him too much—I mean in mind and thought. And he has grown so strangely variable—sometimes elated and unnaturally boisterous, as he was yesterday; sometimes depressed by brooding melancholy; sometimes"—and she looked around apprehensively—"some-time I almost think, Hamish, that he is—afraid!"

"A sick man's fancies!" I answered, affecting an assurance that I was far from feeling. "Besides, the doctors have doubtless been giving him some stuff that may elevate or depress his spirits. Drugs to relieve pain have those effects."

"Drugs!" she exclaimed, rather wildly; "I hate and fear the name of drugs. Curious, is it not, that both Christine and my father should have secretly warned me against their use!"

"But surely such warnings are unnecessary!" I replied, in some concern.

"I am never ill," she returned, "and have never thought of such a thing. But, Hamish," and she looked about her once more, "it is perhaps a breach of confidence to hint such a thing, but I believe that Christine herself must take something to make her sleep. Often, when I have been wakeful through the night, I have knocked and beaten upon her locked door, and never succeeded in rousing her."

"And are you often wakeful?"

"Sometimes," she answered simply, "and sometimes I sleep—oh! so heavily! and dream, the strangest dreams."

"Yes?" I interrogated.

"I imagine myself in father's room; and men—coarse, common men—come and go with huge portfolios of papers and letters. Is it not strange, Hamish?"

"Very!" I answered gravely.

"Once," she went on, "I dreamed that I was down here: I felt myself swiftly carried, and awoke, as I thought, in this room. It was so real that I can hardly realise it was only a dream. Men were writing in great books at long tables, close to the inner wall. My father was walking about, quite well and strong, and Parker and Christine were here also. My father seemed very angry, and said to Christine, 'Why have you—you of all people—done this?' She laughed and said it was not as he thought, then something about influence, power, and harmlessness."

"Influence—power—harmlessness?" I repeated.

"Yes. Is it not funny that these words should re-

main in my mind? I awoke repeating them next morning."

"And did you tell this dream to any one?"

"I was afraid they might think it silly," she replied, "so I kept it to myself. Do *you* think it silly?"

I confess that this artless confidence had made me distinctly uneasy; but, anxious to reassure her and chase from her sweet face all signs of unwonted foreboding and unhappiness, I answered soothingly—

"I think, dearest heart, that you are merely fatigued and worn out by anxiety, and perhaps a little over-excitement, and——"

"My dear practical lord!" she interrupted, brightening up, "of course you are right! A gallop on Cheeky, my brown mare, drove it all out of my head. You ride, don't you?" she went on, with charming irrelevance.

I admitted that horsemanship was one of my few accomplishments.

"Then we can give you a mount, and I shall be ready in half an hour," she exclaimed, springing up gaily.

"But, sweetheart, I must first see your father, must I not?" I remonstrated. "Even now I am late for my appointment!"

"I don't think it will be a very trying ordeal," she responded, touching a bell. "He had a long and earnest conversation with me this morning. Parker is to come down for you."

Then clinging to me once more, she faltered, in a coaxing little voice—

"Don't tell Harry!"

"Not tell Harry?" I echoed, astounded.

"Not yet!" she pouted prettily, "he might be foolish about it."

"Have you been flirting with his ingenuous youth?" I asked, in mock seriousness, "or is he, by chance," I went on more soberly, "really in love with you?"

She glanced up at me shrewdly, but merrily withal.

"Harry is so constituted that he may make himself believe anything. When he does fall in love really, it will be with some one my direct opposite. He is a ridiculous boy, always confiding in me his grand

passions ;” and the merry twinkle once more sparkled in her eye ; “at present it is some divinity whom he dreams of having met somewhere, and whom he confuses with that young woman he saw in the train.”

“I have not heard of this,” I said.

“I think that I am his sole confidante,” she replied, “but, like father and myself, Harry is given to moods. He might become morose, and fancy himself much ill-used. We don’t want his opera to fail a fortnight hence, do we ? Please, Hamish, wait till then !”

“If you say so——” I answered reluctantly.

“My first command, sir !” she cried. “If I know anything of you, and unless that mouth and chin belie you, I am not likely to get much of my own way afterwards, tyrant !”

“So be it then !” I replied, though still rather unwillingly, “and after the opera is produced we shall break the news to him together.”

We had just time to spring apart when the lift descended, and I was taken up by the attendant, Parker, to Mr Langworthy’s room.

I found him in his wheeled chair, sitting at an easel in one of the window recesses. He was dressed with more care than on the previous day, wearing a suit of tweed clothes and an ordinary collar and tie. His manner was placid, and his look, as I entered the room, kindly and humorous. Altogether, though his appearance was less picturesque, the impression of straightforward uprightness and honour which I had formerly received was only deepened and strengthened by all that passed between us that day.

“You are not quite punctual to the minute,” he cried, urging his chair towards me, “but I suppose the journey that has ended in lovers’ meeting has been excusably protracted.”

“I presume, then,” I observed, in some trepidation, as I seated myself at his request, “that it is hardly necessary for me to announce the object of my visit.”

“You need not mind the presence of Christine,” he remarked, smiling as he caught sight of me eyeing that methodical and plain-looking young woman writing at

a desk in another window recess, "she is entirely in my confidence."

"Indeed! Even in regard to family matters?"

"Even in regard to affairs of the heart!" he returned, with a laugh that seemed to contain a trace of mockery.

We might have been carrying on this conversation in Kamtschatka, so little attention did Christine appear to bestow upon us. Indeed she refrained even from looking round.

"Like all the rest of you," said Mr Langworthy, pointing to the easel at which he had been engaged, "I have fallen victim to your versatile and accomplished friend Haviland. These are some sketches for the dresses in the second act of that ridiculous so-called opera of his."

I looked at the firmly drawn, beautifully coloured productions with admiration.

"Your own accomplishments, sir," I commented, "seem to me, to say the least of it, quite as varied and masterly as those of Haviland."

He smiled, half-deprecating, half-contemptuous, as he responded.

"Varied and versatile! Unstable as water, we shall not prevail! Go down on bended knee every night, Hamish Stuart, and thank your God that you were not born accursed with the artistic temperament!"

"I shall offer no such impious prayer," I said warmly. "Like Dr Johnson, whom you quoted yesterday, I should be glad to have a new sense given me."

He passed his hand thoughtfully across his brow—a trick which Maria had either inherited or picked up—and pondered for a little.

"An artistic regeneration!" he said at length. "True, the sturdy old downright man of letters knew not the glories of music, to which 'all art aspires'; and, for that very reason, he failed to grasp all that his words implied. I have got no further than this, that art, however it may strive to express itself, in song or story, in painted canvas, in storied urn or animated bust, in cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces—art is, by

its very nature, non-moral. If it were not so, it would not be art."

"You mean," I questioned, "that the artist produces simply to give pleasure, and if he has any other end in view his work ceases to be artistic?"

"Very nearly," he returned. "A true artist cannot have any object but to express himself. If he produces for any other reason, he may be a great philanthropist, a fat and prosperous citizen, a good father, and an impeccable husband; but he is not an artist, and there's an end on't."

"But think," I replied, "of the intellectual delight that he affords to thousands of persons of cultivated taste!"

"There I join issue with you," he answered vehemently. "The appeal of the arts is not to the intellect or the understanding, but to the emotions and sensibilities, as even the highly respectable Sir Joshua Reynolds admitted. Hence the artistic temperament, even of those who appreciate and enjoy, is essentially and entirely unmoral; and from unmorality to immorality, wickedness, and crime is but a step."

"An uncomfortable doctrine, indeed!" I cried, "coming from such a consummate artist as you, sir!"

"Well! well!" he said, changing his tone suddenly, with characteristic abruptness, "perhaps the picture is gloomy, and the conclusion unfair. After all, we can only understand and appreciate through our minds, in the first instance; and Heaven knows that the technical difficulties that beset the writer, the musician, and the painter demand the exercise of other faculties than the senses! But there! you did not visit me to-day to listen to an old man's garrulous criticism of others more able and admirable than himself! First and foremost, I have seen Maria, and 'know all,' as the dramatists say," and he regarded me rather quizzically.

I replied that I hoped he did not disapprove of my aspirations, and was becoming positively eloquent on the subject of our mutual affection, when he stopped me with a gesture.

"I have no objection," he said shortly, "none! You

may be surprised at my frankness; but, without compliment or flattery, I am more than pleased."

I murmured my delighted thanks.

"In the peculiar circumstances in which I am placed," he went on, frowning, and biting at his hand, "which cannot be explained in the meantime, the question of Maria's settlement in life has been a constant cause of anxiety. I need not tell you that she is dear to me as the apple of my eye, reminding me as she does of the one short year of the only true happiness my life has ever known, when her mother was my blest companion. But, like myself, she is cursed with that infirmity of mind which, for want of a better name, I have called the artistic temperament—an endowment bitter sweet! Quite properly and naturally, you think her perfect—No! don't interrupt me, my dear sir!"—as I made to protest—"I say, quite rightly, in your present condition of exaltation, you look upon Maria as perfect. I am only her father, it is true, apt to be blinded by paternal affection, but I am inclined to agree with you. I never knew a more lovable human being than Maria, except one"—and he bowed his head silently—"but her life is merely unfolding. Let her wander down the primrose path of commonplace dalliance; give her ease and luxury, free from all trouble and care; and the inclined way to indulgence and selfishness will grow perilously steep. Yesterday she was an affectionate child; to-day she is a loving woman. Were she to encounter some great grief, hardship, or terrible shock, I believe she would emerge ennobled!"

"I pray Heaven that she may never be put to such a test!" I exclaimed. "I am content to be devoted to her, for a lifetime, just as she is!"

"There speaks impetuous youth!" he cried, "clutching at present joys—

'Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's spray,
That, hushed in grim repose, expects his evening prey.'

But now," he went on briskly, "to business! All this preliminary fencing is but a prelude to the battle. There is one momentous, vastly important question to

be put. Between ourselves, and as man to man—what is your income?”

I had come prepared for some such examination; so, after a side glance at the uncompromising back of Christine—which urged my interlocutor into a fit of silent laughter—I let him know the secrets of my fee-book.

He nodded with evident satisfaction.

“Are there many young counsel at your Bar who can show such a satisfactory bank account?” he inquired.

“Very few, I am sorry to say.”

“Nay! You should be glad!” he chuckled. “If practice were too well distributed in our poverty-stricken country, you might all get a mouthful but none a full meal. Is yours the largest junior practice in the Parliament House?”

“My clerk tells me that I am at present second from the top,” I answered, with, I hope, all becoming modesty.

“It is a noble profession,” he burst out suddenly, “and, for a man with health, strength, ability, and luck, must be a glorious life!”

“It is a life of unremitting toil and anxiety,” I grumbled.

“That is the first false note you have struck!” he said. “Nothing is worth attaining, nothing!—wealth, success, or fame,—that is not gained by labour. I look upon the profession of a practising barrister as in itself noble, when pursued in the proper spirit. The ultimate end and aim is not mere mastery over one’s opponent, and the gaining of verdicts and judgments. These are the immediate goals, it is true; but, to my mind, the glory of your profession consists in this, that in every argument the barrister unfolds, in every question he asks, in every speech he makes, he is not only furthering the interest of his own client, he is contributing, by the litigious method, to the task of unhusking and discovering that which lies at the root of every question between man and man, the kernel of truth and justice, that eternal principle which jurists call the permanent element in positive law or the law of nature, and theologians designate the will of God.”

"Then you also are among the prophets and professors of philosophical jurisprudence, sir!" I exclaimed.

He turned it off with a laugh of pure enjoyment.

"It may sound learned and original," he shouted, with an almost boyish delight, "but is all Haviland, pure Haviland! I had him here for a couple of hours last night, and we had it out together. 'Tis a thousand pities that there was no love lost between his profession and himself at the beginning, which it has pleased Heaven to decrease upon further acquaintance! It is refreshing to encounter him, the most intellectually alert young man I have ever met. At the same time," he added, laying his hand kindly on my shoulder, "I am more thankful than I can say that, for Maria's sake, it is not Haviland, but you!"

For the first time, Christine showed signs of animation. Half turning in her chair, she cast at me a quick glance as if to remind me of our conversation in the gardens of Princes Street.

"And now that I know your financial position," Mr Langworthy continued, "it is right that I should tell you something of mine. Nay, do not protest yet! You may have some reason to do so before I finish! You have heard, of course, that I am a man of, shall we say, considerable wealth?"

I replied that I understood so, in a general way.

"A convenient phrase!" he assented drily. "And has Dame Rumour also advised you that I am a somewhat avaricious person?"

"She would be, more than usually, a lying jade if she had!"

"Maria is a prejudiced witness on that matter," he laughed; "but I am in sober earnest. Understand this—it is not my intention to give Maria a dowry. There will be no 'tocher,' not one sixpence during my lifetime."

Here he raised his voice, speaking with fluent distinctness. Parker, who had recently entered, withdrew at that moment into the bedroom, and Christine, gathering up her correspondence, went out by the door leading to the landing.

"I am by no means sorry to hear you say so, sir," I answered, quite honestly.

"That is well," he said shortly. "You have no question to ask on the subject?" he went on, "no natural curiosity as to the reason of this unpaternal parsimony?"

"Why should I presume to question your motives, sir? I have no doubt that you have reasons satisfactory to your own mind. We shall be able to live, granted that my health and strength continue, if not in affluence and luxury, at least in comfort."

"Well spoken!" he cried heartily, "and just as I expected and desired. There is no such risk for the newly-launched matrimonial bark as when the two mariners pull independent oars. It is my desire that, to begin with, Maria should have to rely solely upon you. When I die——"

"Which may the gods long delay!" I interposed.

"It will be another matter. I shall leave to Maria all that I possess, which may be a colossal fortune, and may be—nothing. Don't count on it! Heed my solemn warning, and, for God's sake, don't anticipate it! And, if I should not fulfil this promise, or even if I should be compelled to break it, remember that I have never lost the Scottish domicile of my birth. I never wavered in my *animus revertendi* during all the time of my residence abroad, and now I am possessed of the *animus remanendi*. That should be sufficient, eh? There can be no question about that?"

"Not if your domicile of origin was Scottish," I replied.

"Then, in any case, Maria will be entitled to her legal rights. Should I ignore these rights in any testamentary writing," and he lowered his voice almost to a whisper, "do not hesitate to have it set aside, if necessary. Be sure that Maria's just legal claims are respected to the uttermost farthing. All this may sound mysterious now; but it will be plain in days to come. These are my terms. Are we agreed?" and he held out his hand, which I clasped warmly.

"Then, let me say in all sincerity, that there is no

one—no one—whom I should more gladly welcome as husband of my daughter.”

We shook hands in silence, and with some emotion.

At this stage Christine returned with an evening newspaper which she placed in his hands.

“Is there anything here that you desire me to read?” inquired Mr Langworthy, looking up.

“Your friend, Mr Pennifeather,” said Christine, addressing me for the first time, “has been getting into trouble.”

“What kind of trouble?”

“Ah! here it is,” said Mr Langworthy. And he proceeded to read aloud:—

“‘Mysterious attack upon a gentleman in the West End.—Yesterday afternoon, about five o’clock, Mr Charles Pennifeather, a young English gentleman, at present residing in the Megatherium Club, Princes Street, while passing through the lane lying to the south of St Asaph’s Church, Queen Anne Square, was savagely attacked by a man, who attempted to stab him. Fortunately, however, the weapon merely penetrated the sleeve of Mr Pennifeather’s coat and shirt, and no injury was inflicted. The miscreant immediately made off, and has not since been traced. No reason can be assigned for the dastardly outrage, but the police are following up a clue.’”

“How extraordinary!” I exclaimed.

“‘Dastardly outrage’ is good!” quoth Mr Langworthy, tossing the paper aside contemptuously. “Sweet are the uses of advertisement!”

“Then you think——?” I began.

“I think Mr Pennifeather a rather fly-by-night person, of insatiable curiosity, with a craving for notoriety,” he returned casually. “It might be well to advise him to follow the course by which thousands have attained fortune.”

“And that is?”

“To mind his own business,” he snapped, while Christine nodded approval. “Where is Maria, Christine?”

“In her room, changing into her riding-habit, I believe,” she replied.

"Then let her know that I am ready to bestow a fatherly benediction!"

As he spoke my darling appeared, dressed for our evening scamper. Her hair she had coiled up tightly enough, but it still lay rebelliously low down on the nape of her neck, with sweet curling tendrils escaping at each side. The neatly cut, close-fitting riding-coat that she wore showed the slim maidenly beauty of her upright but lissome willowy figure, and her modest and graceful air, as she came half-shyly up to me and placed her ungloved hand in mine, was all that was winsome, and captivating, and kind.

"Maria!" said her father tenderly, "I have just told Hamish that there is no one to whom I would more gladly resign my daughter—my very dear daughter! There! there!" he murmured, as she threw her arms impulsively round his neck and hid her face on his breast, "do not waste your young kisses on a hardened old sinner! Go, with my dearest love, to your promised husband!"

Without a word, she held up her sweet lips to me.

Parker had come into the room.

"Not presuming to intrude, miss," he said in his wooden way, "but I wish you joy!"

"Thank you, Parker!" she said, and then turned radiantly to Christine, who was fumbling nervously with a portfolio. Without looking up, she murmured awkwardly—

"I congratulate you, I am sure."

"Surely, surely, that is not all you have to say, Christine?" cried Maria, casting herself into the other's arms. "Are you not glad that I am happy? Oh! Christine, be good to me! be kind to me!"

After a struggle with herself, the strangely agitated Christine yielded to Maria's embrace, kissing her, almost fiercely, over and over again.

"Who am I that happiness should come to youth and beauty at my desire?" she cried, sniting her breast. "And, being as I am, will joy ever come to you when I invoke it?" Then bursting into a passion of tears, she rushed from the room, sobbing in heartbroken

accents, "I cannot bear it! It is not fair! It is not fair!"

Father and daughter gazed at each other in silence.

"What's the matter? What is it—oh, what is it?" Maria murmured in a distressed whisper.

Slowly Mr Langworthy's head sank on his breast.

"A strange nature!" he soliloquised, "a strange, warped nature, God forgive us all! and have pity on the man that brought her to this! Parker," he said, "send Miss Langworthy's maid to attend Miss O'Mara in her room."

Then, recovering his composure with an effort, he added—

"There! there! do not let this incident disturb you, you two! It is a passing phase of a much-trying woman's suffering. Time is the great healer. Go for your ride, my children! Christine will be herself again before evening. That I promise you; and Hamish shall dine with us, if he can spare the time, to-night. I shall descend to the dining-room for the first time in honour of the event!"

CHAPTER VI.

MR LANGWORTHY DISCOURSES ON THE ETHICS OF
GAMBLING.

MEANTIME preparations for the great production of Harry's "Counsel and Fisher-Girl" proceeded apace. Rehearsals were called for almost every afternoon and evening, and were attended with the nonchalant irregularity of the irresponsible amateur. Dialogue was pruned and polished, situations were developed and discarded, songs were altered, rewritten, and then cut out entirely, with all the wild and chaotic incoherence of the typical confusion attendant on the prospect of a first theatrical performance. Harry was in his element—composing, teaching, suggesting, smoothing down the ruffled plumes of offended artists, fiddling, and tearing his hair with equal impartiality. Maria had never a moment to spare for me. Now she was deep in the mysteries of "costume," now consulting with upholsterers, gas-men, electric-light men, and "property" men; always in the best of tempers and highest spirits, her transitory cares and depression thrown to the winds. Even Mr Langworthy himself became infected by the general enthusiasm, and insisted on having the manuscript, both words and music, sent upstairs for his perusal. Only Christine seemed to retain her usual serene and distant air. The strange outbreak of that memorable afternoon was never again alluded to, and now she pursued the even tenor of her way, always ready for anything required of her, but as unmoved and undisturbed by the general bustle and excitement as a limpet.

The whole west end of Edinburgh was agog with excitement and curiosity. Invitations were begged, intrigued for, and fought over. To crown all, the guests were requested to don fancy dress, as an adjournment was to be made after the play to the Assembly Rooms in George Street, where the evening's entertainment was to conclude with a ball.

Pennifeather had returned from town, silent and uncommunicative as to the result of his visit. By this time, however, both Robert and I had had enough of his suspicions and forebodings, together with his fantastic theories as to the identity of Mr Langworthy. In obedience to Maria's request I had kept secret the fact of our betrothal—not that I quite approved the false position in which I thought that we thus placed ourselves, but content to humour her earnest desire that we should wait till the eventful “night,” about which all the performers were constantly talking, and doubtless dreaming.

The “principals” were bidden to dine with Mr Langworthy on the evening of the dress rehearsal, and I, as a favoured outsider, was honoured with a special invitation, much to Harry's candidly expressed disgust.

“Why should old Hamish be found consorting with the elect?” he inquired. “Is Saul also among the prophets?”

However, this ribald objection had been overruled, and I was there. There also was Proudly, suspiciously attentive to Honoria M'Skimming, and there, of course, was Christine O'Mara, in a dismal high-necked gown, even worse fitting than usual, her hair in the inevitable dark braids, and bunched out unbecomingly over her ears and at the back. Distant and uncompromising as usual, she could not, however, refrain from a meaning smile when she caught my eye, after glancing at Honoria and Proudly.

“What a charming smile that woman has!” I thought to myself, “and what a pity it is that otherwise she is so plain, and so badly dressed.”

Harry, who sat on Maria's other side, was in the gayest of spirits, full of quips and fancies, rattling on even more brilliantly and inconsequentially than usual to his fair neighbour and to Christine on his other hand, who replied to him, when necessary, in crisp monosyllables. Robert, nervous and preoccupied, was ever and anon unconsciously writhing and twisting in his chair, obviously struggling to fix in his memory some elusive lines of his rôle. The only members of the party—with the exception of Christine—who appeared quite normal and at ease were our host and Pennifeather, who sat side by side, apparently the best of friends, with never a sign that they were animated, either of them, by any other feeling than mutual trust and goodwill.

"Have you had any more adventures, Mr Pennifeather?" inquired Maria across the table in an interval of comparative silence.

He adjusted his monocle with deliberation.

"You remember my story of the macer and his old light idle?" he asked.

"Who didn't see the joke," I interpolated.

"Precisely! Well, the macer and our dear friend, the silent Poole, are in the same boat."

"Alike impervious to anglicised jocularity?"

"Each of them," said Pennifeather, without a smile, "stands in need of that surgical operation which would do no good."

"I understood, however," said Mr Langworthy, "that your adventure was no joke so far as you were concerned!"

"I have been informed," Pennifeather answered, "though I have not spoken, even to Miss O'Mara, on the subject"—and he bowed to her gravely as she eyed him with a stony stare—"that the expense of mending my coat sleeve will far exceed any transient popularity I may have achieved."

"Now, I am open to bet——" Harry began.

"Don't," interrupted Mr Langworthy, "it is a pernicious practice—especially when you lose, or win without being paid! I spent the whole of the evening before

last in demonstrating to Mr Pennifeather the evils of gambling, who is himself an awful example of its baneful results."

"And yet," said Pennifeather plaintively, "I have repented and prospered."

"Prospered!" echoed the other scornfully. "Whoever heard of a gamester prospering? At the same time, if I remember rightly, Robert, your friend Dr Johnson defends the practice?"

Roused from his preoccupation, Robert—who had been assimilating food with the ghastly, pretended enjoyment of a prospective after-dinner speaker—made reply with an effort—

"Only after he had made up his mind which side he would take, if you recollect, sir!"

Mr Langworthy expanded jovially.

"Robert always answers to the spur! I have tried him with Shakspeare, snared him with Macklin, and laid traps for him in Boswell, but he is invariably on the spot. Come, now," he continued, "let us divert our minds from the coming ordeal by having a round of questions on this subject. Haviland, what does Dr Johnson say about gaming and wagering?"

Harry ruffled his hair in smiling perplexity.

"Of course we all know," he said at length, "but I for one have not my information pigeon-holed in different compartments of a head like Robert's."

"Leave the head and front of my offending alone, young sir," quoth Robert brusquely, "and unmuzzle your wisdom!"

"I hate the didactic old ruffian," Harry responded, after some consideration, "and when I think of his ill-mannered suggestion about 'the finest prospect that a Scotchman ever sees,' feel inclined to dust his jacket till his pension rattles in his pocket; but, if I remember rightly, he says something like this: If I choose to back my skill, a man more skilful is entitled to teach me a lesson in humility by taking my money. That, and something else—I forget what."

"Does any one remember?" asked Mr Langworthy.

The only answer came from Christine, of all people.

"A man who wins another's money merely transfers the wealth of one to the pocket of another without intermediate good," she quoted; "but," she added primly, almost viciously, "it's not true, and I don't believe it!"

"That's final!" sighed Pennifeather, with the air of one who has heard the correct answer to a good conundrum.

"The question," Mr Langworthy began, in his usual half-sarcastic style, "is luminously but not conclusively treated by the great moralist. If I were to dilate on the subject, in his own inimitable manner, I should be prepared to argue that it is the law of the land and not the practice of gaming and wagering that has rendered so many gamblers untrustworthy and unscrupulous."

Here there arose murmurs of shocked protest from Maria and Miss M'Skimming, ably seconded by Horatio Proudly.

In complete disregard of the interruption he proceeded to expound this startling theme:—

"For you are to consider, sir, as our oracular authority would have said, that the gambling instinct is implanted in our very nature. It is there for good or evil: always has been, and always will be, only in a less degree than the instinct of sex or the instinct of worship. In all ages and under all conditions this holds good. You may admit or deny, approve or deplore, but that does not alter a plain incontrovertible matter of fact. In such a state of matters the law, instead of regulating and recognising this inherent propensity, refuses to direct it into beneficent channels, wilfully shuts its eyes to its existence, endeavours, by cowardly and indirect methods, not only to ignore it, but to refuse the protection of its sanction to those who legitimately profit by it."

"All this," said Robert, "I admit, except the appropriateness of your adverbs."

But the speaker refused to be side-tracked. "Take two examples," he said, "and observe the contrast! One man engages that he will pay another a certain sum on the occurrence of a certain event. If, when that event does happen, the obligant declines to fulfil his contract, the law steps in and compels him to do so. But if, on

the other hand, the event be uncertain, such as that a certain horse will win a race, and the obligant there also refuses to do what he undertook, the law washes its hands and declines to interfere. Now why should that be?"

"Because," said Robert sententiously, "the law does not concern itself with a *sponsio ludicra*."

"Bah!" shouted Mr Langworthy, now growing quite warm. "In what respect, pray, is the one contract less solemn, and why should it be less binding than the other? The inevitable result of it all is that the whole wagering community—the bulk of mankind—are legally transformed into a set of outlaws, who may break their pledged words to each other with impunity."

"That's all very specious," said Harry irritably, "but there's a fallacy somewhere. I know there's an answer, if I could only divert my mind sufficiently from this confounded rehearsal to think of it!"

"Ha! ha! ha!" exulted Mr Langworthy, once more in good humour. "Cornered, by Jove! But we shall read the reply in an article in the 'Law Journal' one of those days. Mark my words, however! The winners of unpaid bets will soon arise in their wrath and help themselves where the law refuses to aid them."

"I have heard rumours," said Proudly, "of a society with some such object as that which you have adumbrated as the cogent reason of its existence."

"Have you indeed?" returned Mr Langworthy, suddenly subdued. "Now, that's a pity! I had imagined it was my own original idea and invention."

"But has any one ever heard," asked Pennifeather, "of a society which anonymously repays unhappy mortals sums of money out of which they have been unjustly swindled?"

"I wish I had!" ejaculated Mr Langworthy with great fervour, casting a pious look upwards.

"If there is no such philanthropic institution," remarked Pennifeather, "then I am either a long-lost heir in disguise or the spoiled darling of fortune."

Christine looked disdainfully at me, and murmured in an undertone—

“Posing for effect, as usual.”

“Do tell us about this, Mr Pennifeather,” cried Maria.

“The adventures of Pennifeather——” Haviland began.

“Oh! shut up, Harry!” exclaimed Robert, quite snappishly for him. “Give us the story, Pennifeather.”

“We are all attention,” said our host politely.

“In the year '79,” Pennifeather began, while leisurely peeling an orange, “I was not at Doncaster September meeting, ‘a very particular circumstance with me in those days,’ as Sam Weller observes.”

“Reprobate!” interrupted Mr Langworthy. “Go on!”

“Three or four days ago I learned, for the first time, that I was supposed to have dropped exactly five thousand pounds at the meeting where I was not present.”

“And had you not?” Mr Langworthy inquired.

“I had not a penny on a single race, a fact which I was able to establish to the satisfaction of my friend who informed me.”

“Then you did not pay this five thousand pounds?” asked Maria, who had been listening with her usual lively interest.

“I did not owe it, and was never asked for it,” returned Pennifeather. “Then followed two coincidences. Within a few months after the '79 St Leger I was defrauded of the exact sum of £5000, as I told you the other night, sir!”

Mr Langworthy inclined his head.

“I grieved to hear of it,” he answered, and of the man whom you believe, erroneously I hope, to have brought it about.”

“Is there any sequel, then?” I asked.

“There is,” said Pennifeather. “That is the second coincidence. This very morning I received by post from London a parcel containing Bank of England notes for £5000 plus interest from the date of the fraud.”

“What!” we shouted, with one voice.

“Together with this,” and he handed round a plain

visiting-card, on which was printed the one word "restitution."

"And what is the explanation?" Mr Langworthy asked, after we had inspected the thing with all-becoming gravity.

"That," said Pennifeather, as calmly as before, "is what puzzles me to distraction. The man who spoke to me in London about the false report of my Doncaster losses is a racing tout without a penny; and the man in Wakefield netted far more than £5000 by the transaction there. He is not the kind of person to make restitution—even if he is alive—and so, it cannot be conscience money," and he looked at our host in seeming perplexity.

"I believe," said Miss M'Skimming timidly, "that it was all the work of Mr Proudly's society. They found out first that Mr Pennifeather had not paid his debt, so they robbed him of £5000. Then they discovered that he never owed it, so they paid it him back again."

"Excellent and rare Matilda!" cried Harry—"Matilda" being Miss M'Skimming's name in the play—"you have solved the enigma! It is like a plot for a melodrama, 'The Avenging Crooks, or The Gamblers' Repentance.' And now, sir, if you do not mind my suggesting it, is it not time for us to join the awaiting chorus of men and maidens, together with the orchestra, in the music-room?"

"Certainly! I am coming too," Mr Langworthy assented. "Parker, help me to guide this erratic contrivance!"

As he passed by Maria she put out her hand, staying the progress of the chair.

"Did Mr Pennifeather tell you, two nights ago, of his loss of all that money in Wakefield?" I heard her whisper.

"He—er—did certainly mention—er—something to that effect."

"You dear old dad!"

Then, turning to me with swimming eyes, she said—

"Come, Hamish! To-night and to-morrow you shall

see me as a disengaged and wilful young woman for the last time! After that you may tell what you will, when you will! But it may interest you to learn," and she drew near me confidingly, "that I have the dearest lover and the kindest father that ever lived; and I am the happiest—the very happiest—girl in the world to-night!"

Then, after an appropriate interval, we followed the others to the music-room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RATIOCINATIONS OF MR PENNIFEATHER.

SOME few years ago Charles Pennifeather was good enough to present to me, among other papers, the diary that he kept during the period in question. As indicative of his methods of setting about the unique profession that he had adopted, these are of intense and absorbing interest. Whether the inferences that he drew and the conclusions at which he arrived were true or false, no impartial reader could doubt the thoroughness and absolute fairness of his preliminary investigations. After Montgomery's graphic account of all that was discussed between the three of us at our meeting in Palace Street, it would be a work of supererogation to detail once more the minute points of evidence, the pros and cons, which led Pennifeather to the firm belief that the dweller in Queen Anne Square was no other than the whilom Merelli and Aylesbury, and in truth the mysterious James Langworthy masquerading as his brother Christopher, the father of Maria. That hypothesis, rightly or wrongly, Robert and I refused to accept, and there, so far as we were concerned, was an end of the matter. But the following extracts from Pennifeather's diary are instructive, as showing the impressions produced on the trained mind of an acute observer by some of the incidents already set forth.

The dinner at Mr Langworthy's was given on the night of Thursday, 8th June; and, under date, "Edinburgh, June 6th," I find the following memorandum:—

"I am beginning now to regret having taken Montgomery and Stuart so deeply into my confidence. Of

course they are both in love with the belle of Queen Anne Square—and small blame to them!—as deeply as Haviland himself. His case, I am afraid, is hopeless; and for some reason (*qy.*, railway train?) Langworthy is secretly afraid of, or antagonistic to, him. If so, Haviland had better beware. . . . I go to see Langworthy this afternoon *by the front door*. No news from Mike as to the ‘cove that tipped him a bob,’ and the analysis of my coat sleeve wholly negative; still, the lane might be unhealthy for me alone.

“*Edinburgh, June 7th.* A momentous discovery. The Raeburn pictures sold at Christie’s were not cut out of their frames in Glenvorlich Hall till two days after the so-called Raeburns were shown me at Wakefield by Aylesbury. No doubt of that, as information straight from the Crown agent, who is also solicitor for the Northshore. This makes confusion worse confounded. Further, received from London this morning an anonymous letter—I should think from the broken-down bookie I saw in the Criterion bar—saying that the fact that I did not bet on the 1879 Leger ‘has been verified,’ whatever that means. Called on Langworthy yesterday afternoon, as arranged. Interesting personality, whoever he is. Clever as paint, but quite evidently trying to double on his tracks somehow. Christine O’Mara there, looking venomous. Wonder why I have got so far into her bad graces. Thought it best to tell L. the whole story of Wakefield, though morally convinced he knew it as well as I. He cross-examined me about Aylesbury, and seemed much impressed by the circumstance of his ‘brother James’s’ photograph having been taken there. He denounced ‘bilkers,’ on the turf or elsewhere; and instanced, curiously enough, the Secretary of the Midlothian, who, it appears, pled ‘gambling debt’ when sued for payment of differences on the Stock Exchange. Told him I had retired from the turf, in consequence of losses, before going to Wakefield. He laughed, and hoped I had left unpaid no debts of honour. Parted, I am afraid, with mutual mistrust.

“*Edinburgh, June 8th.* Received this morning from London registered parcel containing £5000 and printed

card, 'restitution.' What the devil does it mean? Can brother James be really afraid of me, and is he trying to bribe me to 'keep mum'? Telegraphed Scotland Yard to look out for my Criterion friend, whose name I forget, but afraid useless. Went to scene of accident, by the way, on journey from London. Searched wood to west of north-going line, and found—a rusty screw-driver! So that fizzles out, perhaps. Dine with L. to-night. Wonder what Christine will wear, and what she is really like in an evening gown. Strange, how that woman runs in my head.

"*Edinburgh, June 9th, 1 A.M.* Just returned from dinner and final rehearsal at Queen Anne Square. Quite certain now that Langworthy is 'brother James,' and beginning to suspect that Maria knows. By a clever interruption of Haviland, L. switched over the conversation to the subject of betting, to give me an opportunity of owning up to the receipt of the £5000, which I did. Christine looked scornful, and either disbelieved or affected to do so. Maria as much as taxed L. with sending the money (which of course he did). *Query*, Was this sheer goodness of heart? I don't think. Maria seemed strangely interested. Can she be less innocent than she seems?

"Rehearsal in music-room, now transformed to cosy little theatre. First fiddler bungled a 'cadenza,' and L. snatched violin and performed in best Merelli manner. Haviland in raptures! L. brimful of high spirits, laughing himself hoarse over a sword-dance by the Macer and Matilda across the mace and the golf-hole pin, at end of second act. All a great success, Maria a born actress, every movement and gesture the perfection of art, natural or acquired—surely natural at her age! Stuart's usually immobile face a study as he watched her. My own part seemed all right, especially the scenes with Maria. Rest of men sticky and nervous, but promising. Christine looking sorry that 'Mike's' knife did not finish me. Confound the woman.

"Strange news from the Midlothian Bank. The stockbrokers with whom their Secretary refused to settle for differences, are believed to have been paid somehow

the whole of their claim — £6400, and the bank has received anonymously the sum of £3200 — being the balance of £10,000, less £400. There seem to be some eccentric quasi-honest thieves playing fantastic tricks. *Mem.* to inquire into all this next week. Meantime have a presentiment that something significant may happen to-morrow night."

How that presentiment was justified will fall to be explained in due course.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRODUCTION OF THE OPERA, AND THE
PROLOGUE TO THE TRAGEDY.

THE long-looked-for night came at last. Carriageful after carriageful of expectant guests, arriving at the door of the Queen Anne Square house, were directed by an array of footmen to the great entrance to the music-room, where they were received by Mr Langworthy himself, now promoted to a pair of aluminium crutches. In obedience to the hint on the invitation cards, most of the company were in fancy dress—the usual crowd of Chinese mandarins, middle-aged Bo-Peeps, young and innocent Pompadours, scowling Little Miss Muffets, Charles Surfaces by the score tripping over their swords and sporting anachronistic moustaches, Ironsides, Cavaliers, harlequins, Flora Macdonalds, Di Vernons, and maharajahs—the inevitable caravanseraï of incongruous and ill-assorted representatives of fearful and wonderful personages drawn from every time and clime, continent and shore. There were officers from Piershill and the Castle, resplendent in their uniforms; most of the Judges, in black velvet court dress; frowning dowagers of majestic proportions, the Sheriff of the County, and the great Lord-Lieutenant himself, debonair, affable, and epigrammatic as ever,—all ready and anxious to be appreciative and amused, with the genuine kindness of disposition that lurks behind the stiff and reserved manners of the dwellers in Scotia's darling seat—that "Greenland bay of indifference," as Burns designated Edinburgh, somewhat ungratefully and ungenerously.

The animated buzz of conversation died away as Harry took his place in the conductor's chair, and the orchestra plunged into the lively and tuneful strains of the overture, which concluded with the wonderful and unexpected "cadenza" played by Mr Langworthy.

Then the performance went triumphantly forward from success to success. The "jovial counsel from over the Border" gave the opening chorus with full effect in a scene representing the Parliament House in miniature. Pennifeather as Pisistratus M'Robinson, who had adopted the universal prefix to his English name, and wore Rob Roy tartan trews under his advocate's gown from motives of spectacular patriotism, was irresistibly funny—his surprised perplexity at finding his Scottish companions utterly unlike his preconceived notions being only a slight exaggeration of his own mental attitude when we first knew him. The story of the play, such as it was, followed pretty closely the original conception. The disguised fisher-girls sang their chorus with the Scottish "snap," and danced their reel with joyous abandon; but the Junior Bar fended them off from the Judges, whose amatory propensities were not to be trusted.

"To keep these lassies out of the way—

Hooray !

For the rest of the day,—

This is a duty we can't refuse,

'Tis better than pleading a cause we must lose,

That's all we say !"

—and so on for a couple of verses.

It required, however, the arch persuasion of Robert the Macer to defeat the endeavours of the fearless female band; and the first act finished with a wild chorus expressive of the stern determination of the ladies to pursue the Judges of the Court to the *locus delicti*—the golf-course of the Mashiefield Club.

The second act found us at the links, where the Macer was engaged, not in fencing the Court, but enclosing the putting-green.

"Oh, putting-green of Mashiefield,
Where putts are seldom 'in,'

Where never net has ever yet
 Been spread around the pin !
 Who dare maintain they would profane
 Thy sward with fisher's gear ?
 The fearless band shall understand
 Robert the Macer's here ! ”

Now the fearless band arrived — somewhat half-hearted, it is true. Having all changed into picturesque golfing costumes, they appeared more inclined for the sport of flirtation than the ferment of litigation. Besides, all the Judges were in the club-house at luncheon, and could not be disturbed while judging — wine. Matilda, the leader, was, however, adamant, and, as a compromise, it was at last agreed to refer the dispute to the arbitrament of the Macer, who accepted jurisdiction with alacrity.

“ Oh, fisher-maids of Mashiefield, upon the silver sea,
 Come one, come all, who hear my call, and state to me your plea !
 See justice stand, golf-club in hand, with proud majestic mien !
 To learn for why you seek to dry these nets upon the green ! ”

Then followed a delightful parody of the daily wrangle in the Court of Session, too technical perhaps for the general body of the audience, but appreciated with enjoying chuckles by the members of the profession present. At Harry's wicked instigation Robert had modelled himself upon a rather unpopular personage upon the Bench, Lord Pittenweem—who was present, and never forgave him—with unhappy results, of which more hereafter. The scene was at length brought to a conclusion by the startling announcement that the real fisher-girls had withdrawn their claims, as their sweethearts had all turned trawlers. So the members of the female band paired off with their attendant counsel, and the Macer, having claimed the putting-green under a right of “feal and divot,” was only brought to his senses by the threat of a Sheriff to marry him off to Matilda there and then. The claim to “feal and divot” was therefore abandoned, and the putting-green was dedicated to “feasting and flirtation” in a picnic chorus of preparation:—

"Now on the grass let the banquet be spread !
 Soon shall we all be enthroned on the sward.
 Wreathed be the goblets ! of wines white and red
 Luscious and sparkling libations be poured !
 Deer from the forest, wild-fowl of the air,
 Fish from the streamlet and sheep from the wold,—
 These, in profusion abundant, prepare
 In patens of silver and vessels of gold !
 Then drink to the joy of the tale that is told ! "

Hitherto I have said no word of Maria : but in truth she was the life and soul of it all, the embodiment of youthful grace and fragrant sweetness. She pervaded the story : infectious in gaiety, tender and gracious in some semi-serious passages, provocative and enchanting in her scenes of mock love-making with Pennifeather, she glided through her part with the arch lightness and elf-like deftness of a mischief-loving sprite. "And then she danced ! Oh, Heaven ! her dancing !" There is no poetry of motion to excel the controlled interweaving of sinuous grace of body with the agile, varied, neat, and twinkling "steps" of the Scottish strathspey ; and surely never was there a strathspey step-dancer like Maria Langworthy. On that memorable evening she was at her best ; and if there are any survivors to-day of the crowds that used to surround her "set" in the Edinburgh balls of those times, they will bear me out when I say that higher praise could not be given.

Her singing too was, as ever, clear, bell-like, exquisitely cultured and tuneful, each syllable falling on the ear with pellucid and distinct enunciation. Harry had unearthed some doggerel verses containing the germ of a beautiful thought. These he had rewritten and polished ; and she sang the song to a haunting, lilt-ing melody, composed in imitation of traditional Scottish music. It was the fate of some of us to hear that song in that same room again in after years, and in very different circumstances ; and so I transcribe three of the verses here.

"O weel I mind the happy days,
 The sprightly days o' youth's springtide,

When, 'mang the knowes and cowslip braes,
 I wooed and won my winsome bride ;—
 But leeze me on the enraptured hour
 When Hymen wove the nuptial spell,
 And wakened joys, whose blissfu' power
 Pure wedded love alane can tell !
 My bonnie wife !

Oor humble cot, sae spruce and neat,—
 Lo ! 'tis transformed to castled ha' !
 When gay young freends come doon the gait,
 She reigns there, queen abune them a' !
 What though we boast nae routh o' gear,
 Nor seek wi' gentlier folk to shine ?
 Fair pictures, sculptured nymphs, are here !—
 Her grace, her face, her form divine !
 My bonnie wife !

Lang may the rose bloom on her cheek,
 The lambent fires flash in her e'e,
 Nor doolfu' cares, nor sorrows, seek
 To cast their shades on her and me !
 And when oor earthly race is by,
 And life's faint taper flickers low,
 We'll face the fading western sky,
 And, hand in hand thegither, go !
 My bonnie wife,
 The charm o' life,
 My lodestar till the day I dee !
 A' blessings fa' my bonnie wife,
 For aye she will be dear to me—
 My bonnie wife !”

The curtain fell at last upon a scene of wild enthusiasm, one of those moments of intense feeling spoken of by Sir Walter, “when the frost of the Scottish people melts like a snow-wreath, and the dissolving torrent carries dam and dyke before it.” The whole assembly—Judges, soldiers, dowagers, Charles Surfaces, Red Indians, Flora Macdonalds, Chinese mandarins, and all the rest—rose as one man and cheered till the respectable walls of the Queen Anne Square mansion rang again. Congratulations were showered upon Harry, who accepted his blushing honours with his usual smiling modesty. Maria too was surrounded by groups of admirers, male and female, laughing, praising, and expatiating. Robert was slapped on the back and dug in the ribs by several slyly appreciative Senators

of the College of Justice—the classical and correct designation of the Scottish Judges—and was favoured with a scowl of malignant ferocity by old Lord Pittenweem. Hundreds of tiny electric lights concealed in the groined roof suddenly glowed into brilliance as the rest of the performers streamed out from behind the curtains—a merry laughing crowd—and mingled with the spectators. Servants were handing round refreshments, when unexpectedly the curtains were drawn aside once more, and Mr Langworthy himself was discovered alone upon the stage.

Supporting himself with wonderful ease and dignity upon his crutches, he came forward.

“Ladies, my lords, and gentlemen,” he said, “we have witnessed to-night an unexampled effort, so far as my experience goes, the production of an author, poet, musician—about which I shall only observe that it presages great things to come. May I, in name of us all, drink God-speed to the future career of Harry Haviland?”

Needless to say we responded with enthusiastic delight.

“I have two announcements to make,” he continued, “which may be of interest. The first is that the evening is not yet over, and carriages are waiting to convey us to the Assembly Rooms. The second is of a more personal nature. I welcome to-night troops of friends of my dear daughter, many of them her lifelong friends. Circumstances have prevented me from enjoying enough of her sweet companionship in the past, and now, when I had indulged the hope of being reunited to her for years, it appears that the bond is once more to be severed. So soon as my health permits I am called on once more to undertake a long and protracted journey.”

Here Pennifeather, who was standing near me, stiffened into alert attention.

“But,” Mr Langworthy went on, “I shall not leave her without a guardian and protector. I have to ask you to pledge one more toast. It is my proud duty to announce that, with my full approval, my daughter is about to be married.”

Here he paused dramatically, and all looked inquiringly one at another. Many glances were cast in the direction of Harry, who was at that moment holding out his glass to Christine.

She filled it to the brim, whispering, "Drink it up, quick!"

Mechanically he raised the glass to his lips, his eyes fixed intently on Mr Langworthy's face. Robert, troubled and anxious, looked first at me and then at Maria, who was standing almost alone behind the conductor's chair. A grim smile overspread the countenance of Charles Pennifeather as I moved forward to her side.

"I therefore ask you to drink to the health and happiness of Maria Langworthy," cried her father, raising his glass, "and her future husband, Mr Hamish Stuart!"

In a moment there was a babel of sound. Voices, uttering words of the utmost unintelligibility, rang in my ears. Maria slipped her dear hand in mine, and silently returned my fervent clasp. Horatio Proudly confided to Honoria M'Skimming that "circumstances had eventuated precisely as might have been foreseen by any intelligent observer." Robert shook us both by the hand, without a word; while Harry, standing close beside the watchful Christine, grew deadly pale and seemed to reel slightly. Then, drinking down his wine, he tossed the glass aside—his cheek once more flushed and his eye sparkling—and rushed up to us.

Dealing me a great good-humoured buffet on the chest, he exclaimed boisterously—

"You old villain! You secretive, claim-jumping scoundrel, I wish you joy! Maria, my heart is broken! I never was so glad and happy in my life!"

Then, by a lucky inspiration, the orchestra struck up once more the concluding chorus of the opera, which the members of the dramatic company, standing in their places amongst the others, sang again with right good-will—

"Drink to the joy of the tale that is told,"

and, afterwards, we all trooped off to the ball.

Surely never was such an enchanted night! Together we danced all evening, Maria charming me with her arch vivacity, her sparkling wit, and playful raillery. And yet, with it all, was she not so sweetly tender, loving, and confiding? The observed of all observers, she seemed blissfully unconscious of the effect and sensation that she caused. Simply and unaffectedly she accepted the situation, refusing the manifold invitations of each imploring swain.

"To-night I dance with Hamish only," she often said, gently but quite finally; and at length we were left to our own society.

The enraptured hours flew by all too swiftly; and later on we found ourselves sitting together in a lounge. She was idly toying with the glove that she had drawn from her left hand, when suddenly she started up with an exclamation of dismay.

"Oh!" she cried, "I must leave you for a few minutes. Wait for me here, Hamish dear!" and before I could utter a word of inquiry or protest she was gone.

Ten minutes—fifteen—twenty leaden minutes went by,—would she never come?

Pennifeather strolled into the room, looking about in that leisurely, aimless manner of his which I detested.

"Ah!" said he, "all alone? Has Miss Langworthy fled already?"

"She has just left," I answered, chafing inwardly; "she will return immediately."

"Remember the mistletoe bough!" was his singularly inappropriate reply.

If ever man was within an ace of having his head punched, Pennifeather was the man at that moment.

As he spoke, however, Maria appeared, pale, breathless, and disturbed. Recognising Pennifeather, she glanced at him in some dismay, as he bowed and withdrew.

"Has anything gone wrong, dearest?" I asked. "You seem agitated!"

"It is nothing—a trifle! But I must see father at once. Take me to him, please, Hamish!"

We found him in the supper-room, discoursing, in his usual fluent and flamboyant manner, to a crowd of admiring auditors; and Maria seized an opportunity to say a few words to him secretly, to which he appeared to listen with grave attention.

"There is no cause for alarm," he said aloud, "but it was foolhardy all the same! I shall make it all right. There! Take her away, Hamish, and keep fast hold of her now you have got her!" and with a good-natured smile he turned to resume his interrupted observations, while Maria, once more her sweet self, returned with mè to the ball-room.

"Do you know, I have not seen Harry since we left Queen Anne Square," I remarked as we waltzed together.

"Naughty boy! I don't believe he has come." Then, after a pause, she added, "You don't think I have been—unkind to Harry, do you, Hamish?"

"Certainly not," I answered stoutly, with the proud confidence and indifference of victory. "Harry must dree his weird, like many a better man."

"Christine says that I have led him on and broken his heart."

"Christine is an interfering——"

"But it is not true!" she broke in earnestly. "He never spoke a word of love to me."

"And if he had?"

She gave my arm a little reassuring squeeze.

"Christine also seems to be an absentee," I said. "I wonder where she is. I should like to have a word with that young woman."

"No, no! You mustn't!" cried Maria, in distress. "You mayn't know it, but Christine is very very fond of Harry, though she does not show it. She is not like other girls, and frightens me sometimes, it is true; but she is the soul of goodness and kindness. To-night she has had to go to bed with a racking neuralgia. Is it not unfortunate?"

Well, after all, of what interest was Christine—or Harry, for the matter of that—to me? Maria was mine, and we were together! All the Christines and Harrys

in the world could not alter that stupendous fact; and still the roseate hours flew fast away.

It was all over at last. I drove with my darling to the door of her house, and, after many tender farewells till the morrow, walked home to Palace Street, blessing my sweetheart, my happy fate, and all the living world.

There was a light burning in Robert's room; and breaking for once our invariable rule, I burst in upon him unannounced. Pennifeather and he were smoking a final pipe before turning in. But they were not alone, for Harry was there also, huddled up on a sofa, his face rather pale, with a hectic spot on each cheek, his eyes glittering feverishly, his tie awry, and his hands thrust deep down in his trouser pockets.

"Hullo, young sir!" I shouted, "what have you been doing? Where have you been?"

"I have been," said Harry thickly, "in Elysium."

Robert eyed him with a sorrowful look, and Pennifeather grinned.

"And where is that happy land?" I asked.

"What would you give, money down," he answered, "to know? You think that you are there yourself—happy Hamish!—but words cannot paint the joys of the heaven into which I have been initiated! I have ascended to the stars—I have scaled the citadel of paradise—I have——"

"Don't you think you had better go to bed?" said Robert quietly.

Rising, white-faced with offended dignity, Harry marched unsteadily from the room, banging the door behind him.

I stood astounded: for it was impossible to doubt the fact. Harry Haviland, the immaculate, the dear boy, the hero of the evening, the coming man, the admiration of the critical, the inspired poet and musician—Harry, of all people, was obviously and completely, gloriously, unashamedly, and preposterously—drunk!

CHAPTER IX.

THE SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS.

AT this stage I approach, reluctantly and with distaste and repugnance, that period of dark suspicion, dread, and culminating horror, which I would fain pass over as rapidly as possible. True it is that time, the great healer, the medicine of sorrow, grief, and wrath—time, the herald of truth, has now assuaged the first poignancy of my devastating disillusion, and shown me how I might have judged more leniently, and relied less presumptuously on my own egotistical belief in the infallibility of my judgment. But, even now, the recollection of my sufferings, and the undeserved increase of embarrassment and mental anguish that my headstrong wilfulness brought on others, open my wounds afresh, and cause me to shrink from the self-imposed task of truthful narration of the events of the ten days following upon the ball. But, in justice to all concerned, it is only right that these happenings should be chronicled, however imperfectly, without conscious bias.

By the time that Robert and I met at breakfast on the morning following the entertainment at Mr Langworthy's, I had already found a hundred excuses in my own mind for the unwonted dissipation of Harry, after the production of his opera, being distressed only by the remembrance that he should have chosen to make such a humiliating exhibition of himself in the presence of Pennifeather, a comparative stranger. It was soon apparent, however, that Robert was less leniently inclined. It appeared to me that he was unduly depressed

by the incident, and disposed to take much too gloomy a view of the whole affair.

"Come!" I said at last, "after all, he is only a boy, excited by the events of last night! Make some allowance for the exuberance of youth! Even you and I have not always stalked along the paths of strict and sober propriety!"

But Robert was in no laughing humour.

"Where was he?" he asked. "That is what is troubling me."

"He certainly did not come to the Assembly Rooms," I returned: "I know no more. Doubtless he will tell us all about it in good time."

"If he remembers," Robert answered doubtfully. "I have never said a word about it, even to you; but this is not the first occasion. About a week before the railway accident, he turned up in my club in London as he was last night. Then he disappeared. To this day, he says that he recollects nothing—nothing after that, until the moment before the train collision, seven days afterwards."

"I wonder if Pennifeather knows anything," I suggested.

"Pennifeather?"

"Yes. Confound the uncomfortable, secret, suspicious beggar! There is an atmosphere of mystery wherever he goes. He did not turn up at the ball himself till well after midnight."

"We can't ask him," said Robert. "If Harry chooses to make an explanation, well and good. If not——" and he shrugged his shoulders. "At the same time, Hamish, I can't help wishing that you had given him a hint beforehand. That dramatic announcement——"

"To which I was no party," I interposed.

"I thought not; but you must realise it was rather a shock to us all. Harry was bound up in Maria; and, glad as I am to hear the news—and no one could be more sincerely glad, you know that!—I fear that he may take it to heart. Impulsive, and sometimes erratic as he is, it may be that he is harder hit than we imagined."

"It was Maria's wish that the news should be kept

back," I said, "and of course her will was law. But you are surely too timorous. Think how overjoyed Harry was last night, when he congratulated us. He said that he was never so happy!"

"Well, well!" responded Robert, rising, "don't let this conversation spoil *your* happiness, at any rate. Harry is young and will get over it—if he has anything to get over—as we all must," he added with an indulgent smile.

So, after Robert had paid a visit to the room of the young reprobate, and had reported him "sleeping peacefully as a child," we set off together for the usual Saturday morning sitting of the Court. The Judges of the First Division, where I happened to be engaged, seemed no more inclined for intellectual exertion than I was, and we were all too glad to finish by midday.

After lunch at Queen Anne Square, Maria and I went for a gallop in the park of a neighbouring estate to which we were allowed access, and returned to the music-room for tea. There we found Christine, evidently recovered from her bout of neuralgia, and indeed looking brighter and more human than I had ever seen her. The only other occupants of the great room—which had magically been restored to its usual condition—were Miss M'Skimming and Horatio Proudly; while Mr Langworthy was said to be resting upstairs in his own apartments.

"Is Harry not here yet?" Maria exclaimed, with keen disappointment, as she looked around. "Laggard lover! and I did so want to congratulate him, and hear his congratulations!"

"Harry was rather seedy this morning," I remarked casually, "perhaps he is not feeling up to the mark."

"Nothing seriously wrong, I hope?" asked Christine, with more than her usual urbanity.

"The effect of last night's exertions, excitements, and triumphs, I suppose," Proudly suggested.

"Something of the kind, I understand," was my reply.

"I am much displeased with Harry," exclaimed Maria pettishly, "deserting us all, to-day of all days,

after never showing face at the ball! I shall write a severe reprimand on my own special notepaper, to tell him so," and she sat down at her desk to scribble off a note, while Christine rose, asking, as she made to leave the room, whether she should have it posted with the letters.

I said that I was just going home, and should be glad to deliver it; whereupon Christine, after a momentary hesitation, resumed her seat.

"Then, as you are to be messenger, you shall hear what I have said," cried Maria gaily. "It will let him see what I think of his failure to come to the ball—I should not have danced with him if he had come, of course, but he had no right to presume upon that. Listen! 'Dearest Harry'—Is that too friendly, Hamish?" she broke off, with an arch look.

"Not at all," I answered gallantly; "my name not being Harry, there can be no comparisons."

Smiling her appreciation, Maria read on: "'Dearest Harry, you misbehaved dreadfully last night, but I forgive you. Come and let us exchange mutual confidences about your conduct. I have a thousand things to say. Yours always—Min.' That is the name Harry gives me when he is in a specially good humour," she explained. "Now I shall add a *P.S.*: 'Hamish carries this. I have read it to him, and he approves.'"

This was the first fateful letter, written, as it appeared to me then, in girlish gaiety and lightness of heart. I took it away with me to deliver to Harry, whom I found sitting morosely in his own room, comforting himself with a whisky-and-soda—a most unusual indulgence.

"Hullo! What's this?" I exclaimed disapprovingly—"a hair of the dog, eh?"

He coloured painfully as he replied—

"Hamish! was I—did you think I—was I really drunk last night?"

"You were an excellent imitation of a drunken man, at all events!"

"Well, I——"

"You don't deny it, I hope?" I asked severely.

"I don't, if you say so; but how it happened I cannot imagine. I was quite unconscious of having taken anything worth mentioning."

"The less said about it the better, I suppose you mean," I returned. "What became of you? Where were you? You said you had scaled the heights of Elysium, or some such rot!"

He passed his hand through his hair, and drank his whisky-and-soda at a gulp.

"I do talk nonsense sometimes, don't I?" he answered, with a feeble smile.

"Well, where were you?"

"You would hardly believe me if I said that I don't know——"

"Then you won't tell me!"

"Let it go at that!" he answered fretfully. "Take it that I would rather not say where I was—if you don't mind."

"Not with Pennifeather, were you?" I asked sternly.

"Pennifeather!" he exclaimed, in genuine astonishment—"good Lord, no!"

"Hum!" I said. "Well, we'll say no more about it. But Maria is much displeased with you, young man!"

"Displeased!" he stammered, reaching toward the decanter.

"Now, do not fly to the bottle!" I laughed, moving it out of his reach. "So much displeased is she that she has written you on the subject, and here is the indignant epistle!" and I handed him the letter, which he read through twice, meanwhile flushing to the temples.

"Oh! you needn't blush about it!" I laughed. "Bless you, I know what it contains."

"You know—you?" he cried aghast.

"About your misbehaviour!" I replied banteringly.

He looked at me apprehensively, without answering.

"Well! Well!" I went on rather amused, "although you did not come to the Assembly Rooms, it is not a deadly sin, or an unforgivable offence!"

He recovered himself with an effort, and read the letter again.

"Ah, yes," he murmured, "she refers, of course, to my staying from the dance. And, in fact, I was not there—was I?"

"It's my belief," I answered finally, "that you are right: you don't know where you were! In order to make your peace, the best thing you can do is to put on your hat and go round with me to-morrow afternoon to apologise."

Harry folded the letter very carefully, and placed it in its envelope, which he thrust into his pocket. Then he gazed moodily on the floor for a few moments, and took a turn or two about the room.

"I'm not going, old man," he said at length, quite quietly.

"Not going? Till when?"

"Never again!"

"But I don't understand," I retorted, in blank amazement. "Do you mean that your friendship with Maria is to come to an end now, without a word of explanation? Good God! boy, don't you see that will mean breaking with me? What are you thinking about?"

My eye followed him as he resumed his restless perambulation of the room.

"You know," he said, "what you and I are to each other. Nothing shall ever change that, or lessen the love I bear you. You had a right to choose, and I am sure—I think—at least I hope you will be happy in your choice. But, by our very friendship I conjure you, Hamish, do not ask me to return to that house, for I cannot, I dare not go!"

"I don't like this, Harry," I said, in growing indignation, "and I am bewildered. Last night you were loud in congratulation, and now you speak thus. You put strange thoughts in my head, Harry Haviland! What reason can there be why a decent well-living man—as I always believed you—should be afraid to meet my affianced wife?"

"I swear to you, Hamish," he cried, with increasing agitation that was painful to witness, "that, up to the moment when I heard the announcement of your engagement last night, not one word had passed between Maria

Langworthy and me that all the world might not have heard."

"And you have so contrived that no word, good, bad, or indifferent, has passed between you since."

Then, as he remained silent, I continued icily—

"Am I to conclude that your present attitude arises from some knowledge or experience you gained in the haunt of iniquity where you spent the small hours of this morning?"

"Hamish!" he cried, wringing his hands, "have pity and be silent! Think that I am a jealous fool—think me an envious beast—think that it is because I have lost my self-respect, my inspiration, my happiness—my very soul; but do not take your friendship from me! Cannot we go back—O Lord! go back to the bright companionship and splendid innocence of yesterday!"

Baffled, perplexed, suspicious, and mystified as I could not but be, the evident sincerity of his distress touched me deeply.

"Go back?" I echoed, more gently—"go back whither? Do you want me to break my plighted word to Maria?"

He regarded me with a look, at once miserable and yet eloquent of expectancy.

"Believe me," I continued, "nothing could grieve me more than for you to think that I have taken advantage of you in this matter. Robert thinks, and I think so too, that it would have been kinder had the news of our engagement not been sprung on you so suddenly; but you must take heart, and be a man!"

Poor blind fool that I was!

"It is true," I went on suavely, "that it is easy for me to advise—it is not so easy to do; but I think it right that you should know that Maria's feelings towards you have never been of any other nature than a pure sisterly affection."

He sat for a time lost in thought, his head buried in his hands.

"So be it!" he sighed, rising; "but do not ask me, as you love me, to visit Queen Anne Square just now!"

I gave him my hand, somewhat reluctantly, I am afraid.

"We shall say no more on the subject then," I said, "but I am grievously disappointed."

My disappointment, however, was nothing to that of Maria, when I arrived companionless in the music-room on the Sunday afternoon. She seemed cut to the heart by Harry's defection—almost unduly and unreasonably grieved, I thought.

"You will make Mr Stuart quite jealous," Honoria M'Skimming laughed, "if you hanker so after another young man."

"Mr Stuart," answered Maria, "is a far too sensible *old* man—old dear, I mean," she whispered, "to behave so foolishly. But poor Harry! What can be the matter? Have I, has any one, offended him beyond forgiveness?"

"Perhaps, my dear," said Honoria sensibly, "he thinks it better for his own peace of mind that he should stay away in the meantime."

But Maria was taking the matter too seriously to be even embarrassed by the implied compliment.

"Harry and I," she returned, "were never anything but friends, dear friends, just as Harry and Hamish are! Oh! it will spoil everything if I am to estrange the two men I love—in different ways, of course!"

Christine, who was sitting by, murmured *sotto voce*, with a meaning glance at me—

"Flying at each other's throats! Did I not warn you?"

"Why not write to him again?" she suggested aloud. "I am just going out, and shall be glad to post the letter."

"Will it do any good, do you think?" asked Maria, looking anxiously from one to the other.

"You can but try," I answered.

So another note was hastily scribbled, and handed to Christine, who immediately left the room.

Thus was the second fateful letter sent.

Next morning, being Monday, when the Court does

not sit, we were all rather late for breakfast, Harry, as usual, being last.

Watching with silent amusement and some hope, while he opened the envelope addressed in the dear well-known handwriting, I was more than mortified to observe the manner in which he took it. His expression was not so much grief, or anger, or surprise—although it partook of all three—it was as if he were actually horrified by the words my darling had written. With frowning brows, set lips, and downcast looks, he thrust the letter in his pocket, and made a pretence of going on with his breakfast.

“Well?” I interrogated.

“Well!”

“From Maria, is it not?”

“How do you know that?” he cried defensively.

“Bless you, there is no secret about it. I saw her write it.”

“You saw her write it!—she wrote that in your presence?”

“Certainly! and at my suggestion.”

“Oh! this is too much,” he cried, starting up wildly.

“I think I am going mad!”

“Is that what I am to tell Maria?” I asked sternly.

“Tell her I will not come!” he exclaimed, in grief-stricken tones. “Tell her I cannot come! Oh, my God! My punishment is greater than I can bear!” and he rushed stormily and frantically from the room.

Robert and I gazed at each other in sorrowful amazement.

“Poor boy!” said Robert sadly, “he takes it hard! I thought he might, but never did I anticipate anything like this. What is to become of him?”

“I begin to think he is right,” I answered, more than a little ruffled: “he must be off his head!”

At that moment Harry returned, looking more himself, and wearing a chastened and pathetic air of conciliation, with a poor attempt at his old light-heartedness.

“I am sorry, Hamish,” he said apologetically. “Forgive me! I am not myself. I scarcely know; I am hardly responsible for; what I do or say!”

"The best thing you can both say and do," answered practical Robert, "is to send a wire to Tibbets's Hotel at North Berwick, and take Frank M'George, or some other idle young scoundrel, with you down there for a week or two. A couple of rounds at golf every day is what you want. You are becoming morbid, my boy! The strain of that damned opera has been too much for you."

And so, much to the relief of us all, the thing was arranged and the suggestion acted on.

After all, Maria took the news of Harry's flight very calmly.

"He is a silly boy," was all that she said, "with the irritable self-pity of genius. But it will all come right in time," she added, with a pretty air of motherliness. "Once we are settled down as a couple of old fogies, I shall look out for some staid and placid girl for him to fall really in love with. He is staying at Tibbets's, I suppose?"

That was a glorious week. It had been arranged that we should be married in the end of July; and the business of house hunting and furnishing, trousseau-buying and all the rest of it, occupied most of our spare time. Never was Maria more simply sincere, tender, and sweet, in her every changing mood—demure, mischievous, penitent, gay, and laughter-loving—always lovable and affectionate, fascinating, kind, and dear. Mr Langworthy improved daily in health, and actually accepted an invitation from the Geographical Society of Glasgow to lecture there on the Saturday night, whither he went, accompanied by the faithful Parker, on the Friday, intending to stay the week-end with Lord Strathlomond in his castle on the "bonnie banks" of the famous loch.

On the following Sunday, Maria and I parted at five o'clock in the afternoon. We had been invited to dine at the Poole's that night (Sunday dinner-parties were just coming into vogue in Edinburgh, and were indulged in with the surreptitious joy of secret wrong-doing)—but Maria had sent an excuse at the last minute.

"Christine and I are all alone," she confided in me,

"and she is rather nervous about being left in the house."

"Indeed I am not!" said that strong-minded young woman indignantly; and she certainly did not look it.

"At any rate, I am not going," quoth Maria wilfully. "I know better! she is just pretending. Besides, I am really worn out, and shall go straight to bed after dinner."

I demurred and grumbled, intimating my intention of staying away also. What pleasure would a Marialess dinner be to me? But she insisted.

"Consider your prospects, sir!" she rallied me. "A rising counsel cannot afford to offend the susceptibilities of a real Writer to the Signet! And Mrs Poole expects you, for I assured her that you would certainly be there. Go, like a good boy; and to-morrow you shall tell me all about it."

And so, much against my own inclination, I agreed to do as she desired, whereupon she raised her face to mine for a good-night kiss.

Alas! alas! it was our last farewell.

CHAPTER X.

THE TRAGEDY IN THE MUSIC-ROOM.

IN the absence of Horatio Proudly, who was not present at the dinner given by the Pooles, it fell to my lot to take Honoria M'Skimming home. It was pretty late, for we had spent an unexpectedly jovial evening, and the streets were quite deserted, when we made a short cut, as I called it—though Honoria protested that it was a detour—by the lane leading past the side of the Queen Anne Square house.

"If ever girl deserved a happy life," said the good Honoria as we were passing the house, "it is dear Maria. You must be tender with her, Hamish, as I know you will, tender and gentle. Remember, she has never known the love and care of a mother!"

I was about to answer out of a full heart, when suddenly the words were arrested on my lips.

Through the summer stillness of the night there arose a clear thrilling sound that froze the very blood in my veins.

Maria's voice!

There was, there could be, no doubt about it—Maria's golden voice, full-throated, tear-compelling, touching, and sweet—more powerful and passionate, it seemed to me, than I had ever heard it—singing an unknown lay:—

"Fiercely burns thy wrath consuming,
Circe! Daughter of the Sun!"

Then there came the opening notes of Harry's "Song of Circe," the song that was never, never to be sung again to any ear but mine.

"Listen!" I whispered, spellbound.

"Don't listen! don't listen! Come away!" Honoria urged, pressing me on, and pale to the lips.

"Stop! I say," I ejaculated hoarsely. "What does it mean? Listen! There!"

"Zeus! send me, o'er the waves,
Him who my dread power braves,
And, of his meanest slaves,
I shall be least!"

The compelling voice died away in the high realms of liquid purity, just as I had heard it on that first heart-remembered day.

"It is only Maria practising! Don't let us be eaves-droppers!" protested Honoria, almost whimpering.

"They might at least have taken the precaution of closing the window!" I muttered, bitterly and savagely, looking down at a stream of light stretching across the causeway. (It will be remembered that the music-room was below the level of the lane, and the high corner window consequently just showed itself above the footpath.)

I knelt down to peer in.

"Don't look! don't look!" repeated Honoria, in great distress. "Please, Hamish! don't look, but come away! You terrify me!"

Ah! false and perjured Maria! From my cramped position I was able to see only a portion of the room, and that about four feet from the ground; but there was no mistaking the crown of red golden glory of that faithless head, gradually drooping downward till it nestled on the breast of a man sitting at the piano—curse the window!—a man whose face I could not see! A white rounded arm stole up, as if to clasp his neck. Slowly they moved together out of my line of vision, and then—then suddenly the room was plunged in darkness!

"Great God!" I shouted, and beat with frenzied madness upon the unyielding glass and framework.

"Hamish! Hamish!" cried Honoria, distracted, pulling me back. "What is it? What have you seen?"

Whatever it is, believe me, there is not, there cannot be, any wrong or evil! There must be some explanation!"

"That explanation I shall have, when I obtain an entrance here," I cried, in tones thick with passion, "if I have to tear the wall down with my hands!"

I was in the act of shaking off my trembling companion, who clung to me in an agony of apprehension, when suddenly there arose from within the room a woman's long-drawn scream, and again a beam of light shot from the window across the lane.

"Not that! Not that!" a voice shrieked, evidently in the extreme of mortal dread. "Put it down! Oh! Good God! Not that!"

We stood staring at each other, transfixed with wonder and alarm. A moment or two went by in breathless silence, and the light was once more extinguished. Then, to our amazement, the pavement at our feet seemed to open up by some devilish contrivance—some secret entrance to that house of terror and sin; a man fell heavily out upon the causeway, and the trap glided back again in snake-like silence.

Rushing across to the sprawling, helpless figure, we turned him over and raised him up. It was the insensible form of Harry Haviland!

At sight of the pale, bloodless, boyish face, and pathetically helpless body lying there, my rage and wrath ebbed away.

"Harry!" I cried, "my dear boy Harry! Rouse yourself and take courage! Come! lean on me!"

Together we half-carried, half-dragged him to the mouth of the lane. By the mercy of God, there was no one in sight.

He revived suddenly, and opened his eyes.

"Hamish!" he said wonderingly. "Oh! Hamish, is it you? Take me home, my dear brother Hamish, take me home, for I am dying. Ah!"

Once more he collapsed insensible.

All honour to Honoria M'Skimming! The strength and purpose of a strong man seemed given to those weakly arms, as, with grim and determined set face

she helped me to guide the half-conscious sufferer to our house in Palace Street.

Again, by the mercy of God, there was no one in sight.

As we approached the door, he spoke once again, imploring us to send for Pennifeather. Who went for him I know not, but in a few minutes Pennifeather was there, accompanied by Dr Overbury, the great toxicologist and surgeon of police. Meantime we had got Harry to bed, writhing now and then in great agony. Honoria had roused the household—Robert, fortunately or unfortunately, was not at home—and, together with the housekeeper and servants, busied herself in getting hot bottles, blankets, and restoratives.

He tossed about in a semi-comatose condition for a time. Then, opening wide his great hollow eyes, now burning with fever and anguish, he addressed us two in broken and painful gasps.

"Hamish! Honoria! On your life I charge you. You did not find me in the lane! Remember! You did not find me in the lane, but on this doorstep! Remember! Save Maria! Defend her! Maria—chaste as ice and pure as snow! Ah! The woman—the woman of my dream! The face at the window! What is her name? Circe! Maria—save and defend——"

Again he relapsed into unconsciousness.

"Undoubtedly!" said the great toxicologist, after his arrival, and a careful study of the stricken patient, looking first keenly in his eyes, and then pressing quietly on the pit of the stomach—"undoubtedly!"

"Undoubtedly what?" interjected Honoria, almost snappishly.

"Undoubtedly," said the doctor, elevating his chin, and speaking in a subdued but conclusive and self-satisfied voice, as though he were conducting a clinical class, "undoubtedly a case of poisoning—I should say, arsenical poisoning, but the symptoms are masked, masked by the exhibition of some deliriant intoxicant, perhaps alcohol, perhaps—ah! let me see!" and he scrutinised carefully the wrists and arms of the sufferer.

"Subcutaneous injection!" he said finally, "recently administered. Look for his hypodermic needle!"

"I never heard of his using anything of the kind," I answered in displeasure.

"They are cunning," he said brusquely, "cunning and secret. Search the pockets of his clothes!"

Pennifeather, who had entered the bedroom with Dr Overbury, turned out the pockets of the garments Harry had been wearing, but neither drug nor injection instrument could be found, nothing but some keys and money, a knife, and a bundle of letters, at which I glanced with misgiving and dismay. They were Maria's letters—and now there were three of them!

In a few seconds consciousness again returned. His voice was feebler, and his eye less feverishly bright. Too obviously his strength was failing fast.

"The letters! Burn the letters! burn the letters!" he murmured, over and over again. "Oh! fool, fool, but how could I know? Pennifeather—unmask her! Search the house, and burn the letters! burn—on the doorstep, Honoria! Save her—Maria. The woman of my dream——"

His eyes closed, and he gave one great shuddering sigh. The doctor bowed his head, and held up a warning hand.

"Save her!" the refrain sounded once more, feebler and ever more feeble, "Robert! Hamish! burn letters. Save her! Honoria, remember!" and his voice sank lower and lower, paused, hesitated—and then there was silence.

He was dead.

"A sad tragedy! a brilliant youth!" said Dr Overbury, as he gently closed the door.

"I suppose," I said unsteadily, "that there can be no objection to my fulfilling his dying injunction in regard to these?" and I showed the three letters in my hand.

Pennifeather stamped his foot and turned away, as the surgeon shook his head at me, kindly but reproachfully.

"You have chosen to ask me," he replied, "and to that question I can give but one answer. This is a case for investigation by the police and the Crown authorities; and nothing must be interfered with, nothing destroyed."

"Oh! why did you say a word about them, Hamish?" whispered Honoria, when I had handed the three documents to the doctor in silence.

"But I trust," Dr Overbury went on, with characteristic cheerfulness, "that this dark and seemingly mysterious matter is capable of some simple explanation—undoubtedly, undoubtedly! I have long since learned to put little faith in the delirious wanderings of a poor fellow-mortal *in extremis*. But, as I have said, nothing must be touched in the meantime. I shall lock this door, while I go to my house to telephone the police. It is, every day, more and more inconvenient that we have not yet introduced a central exchange in this city. Poor lad! a bright and promising youth! Let nothing be interfered with, if you please—undoubtedly!"

And, with the talismanic word on his lips, he bowed himself out.

"Where are you going?" inquired Pennifeather, as he saw me putting on my hat.

I glared at him, as if to ask what business it was of his.

"Because," he went on quietly, "if you intend visiting the house in Queen Anne Square, you had better take some one with you."

"What do you mean by that?" I cried angrily.

He pointed silently to the room where poor Harry lay.

"That is what I mean!"

"Why, oh why should you go there to-night, Hamish?" Honoria implored.

I made for the door without answering.

"Stop!" she cried. "If you must go, I will go with you, although the visit may be misconstrued. Remember Harry's dying words—Hamish! Remember!"

Pennifeather looked thoughtfully at her earnest face.

"Ha! 'On the doorstep,' I see!" he said understandingly. "No! There is little danger of its being misconstrued. Unless I am much mistaken, it may serve to clear up this unhappy matter entirely, and a woman's presence may be necessary. Let us all go!"

"I think," said Pennifeather, as the three of us stole

through the silent streets, "I am not sure, but I think we can effect an entrance without disturbing the household, and it may be well to try."

He led us along the lane to the sunken window. Then, stooping down and feeling carefully about, he appeared to find a knob or spring or lever which he manipulated somehow, and immediately the grating and a portion of the pavement opened up, disclosing a short ladder, which we descended, and found ourselves in the music-room, close by the panel where the letters were so frequently shot down.

Creeping gingerly along the wall, Pennifeather laid hands on an electric switch which he turned on, flooding a portion of the room with light. Half blinded by the sudden glare, we gazed about us stupidly

Ah! there lay the woman!—face downwards, her glorious red-gold hair dishevelled, her arms fallen forward, in an attitude of seeming abandonment and despair, over the end of the couch on which she had sunk.

Honorina ran forward with outstretched hands.

"Maria!" she cried, "darling Maria!" and in a moment she had the fair young head pillowed on her womanly bosom, rocking the unconscious figure to and fro, and crooning sweet words of comfort and endearment in the unhearing ears.

"Maria!" Pennifeather repeated, in petrified astonishment. "Maria! Great God! It is Maria, after all!"

Yes, it was Maria, my Maria!—the pure, sweet, innocent, unsullied dove, now disgraced and dishonoured, lying there, her fair young head bowed low in shame and degradation! The pungent odour of the crushed flowers—these poison-breathing, evil omened, untimely, unnatural monstrosities—was heavy in the air, overpowering, alluring, and voluptuous. The tall glasses in which they had bloomed in their accursed beauty lay overturned and broken, and great splashes of purple and blood-red colour marked the spot where they had been crushed and trampled under foot. The broken meats and wines upon a deserted supper-table, and the disordered couch, all told their own tale; and, as the full significance of the scene burst upon my bewildered

imagination, I grew sick with disillusion, fury, loathing, and disgust.

Meantime Pennifeather was hunting through the room with the keen pertinacity of a sleuth-hound, peering into corners, and below couches and chairs, and tapping and pressing with practised and skilled fingers at different parts of the panelling of the inner wall.

"Honor! Honor! This is kind!" Maria murmured sleepily. "Why!" she exclaimed, opening her eyes as if in startled confusion, "How came you here? Where am I? Mr Pennifeather! and—and Hamish! Oh!" and she drew her robe more closely about her, hiding her bosom and her small bare feet.

My heart was turned to ice, while I gazed at her steadily and coldly. Neither of pity nor compassion did I feel the tiniest spark. Enough for me to have witnessed the scene in that room a little hour ago, and to understand now its fatal significance.

"Have you nothing more to say?" I asked, with withering contempt. "Where is Harry Haviland? Where was he to-night? Where were you when you ran from me, with honeyed words of excuse and prevarication, on the night of the ball?"

"Hamish! Are you mad?" exclaimed Maria, with eyes dilated. "Why do you look at me and speak to me so? I don't understand! I don't know how I am here—or you, unless this is a dream again. Oh! Honor! is this a dream?" and she hid her head on that good woman's shoulder and wept. "Say it is a dream!"

"Have you nothing more to say!" I repeated implacably.

"What can I say?" she sobbed. "Why are you so cruel and unkind? I have not seen Harry Haviland since the night of the play. He is in North Berwick, I suppose."

"Have you no more lies to tell?" and, God forgive me! I flung at her a name that made her wince and tremble in shrinking horror. "Harry Haviland was here to-night, in this room with you—alone with you, by appointment, after you had cajoled me by false endearing

phrases to leave you at liberty, and, as you thought, in safety. I need scarcely, I suppose," I added contemptuously, casting my arms wide and looking about, "call your attention to the room's condition now! Harry Haviland was here alone with you to-night, and now he is dead!"

A scream, and then a sorrowful, heartbroken wail, echoed through the room.

As Maria once more cast herself sobbing on Honoria's bosom, Christine O'Mara, emerging from the gloom by the lift leading to the upper floor, stood before us.

Blinded though I was by grief and jealous rage, I could not but be struck by the picture of desolation presented by that woman as she framed with ashen lips the soundless words, "Dead—dead! Harry dead!"

Dressed, as she was, in a flowing gown, evidently thrown on hastily, her bodily deformity was almost, if not altogether, unnoticeable. Her step, too, seemed firmer; but the deadly pallor of her stricken face and the strange scintillating glitter of her piercing eyes gave to her an appearance appalling and unearthly. Her hands fumbled feverishly with her long hair, hanging in thick dark braids, which she seemed ever and anon to be hastily smoothing and adjusting.

"Dead!" she repeated wildly, with horror in her face.

"Yes, dead! poisoned—in this room, within an hour!" I answered sternly.

Then I pointed at her in derision.

"This is the woman," I cried, "who thought that we were not sufficiently respectable, who suggested the necessity for a chaperon! And well she might! Do you mean to tell me, woman, that all this"—and again I looked around upon the tell-tale evidence of a midnight orgie—"could happen here to-night without your knowledge and connivance?"

Unheeding me, she sat cowering on a chair, her hands still clasped about her hair, muttering "dead—dead!"

"Look at her!" I cried again, feeding, and exulting in, my blind and impotent fury. "Look at the kindly counsellor who, playing upon my infatuation, advised,

suggested, aye, almost implored that I should marry—O God!—should marry——”

“Silence, Stuart!” said Pennifeather, and at the sound of that detested voice Christine recovered her composure with a start of unfeigned surprise and indignation.

“Even in your just anger,” he continued, “do not utter words that can never be forgotten or forgiven! In spite of all, you may be entirely mistaken!”

Mistaken? I? Oh! blind! blind!

“I do not know,” said Christine, now mistress of herself, and speaking in cold, cutting, and scornful tones, “by what nefarious means you effected an entrance into Mr Langworthy’s house, in his absence, at this unseemly hour——”

“I thought you might have guessed,” Pennifeather interrupted politely.

“But I must ask you now,” she continued, as if she heard him not, “to be good enough to leave it.”

“Where is she? What have you done with her?” Pennifeather asked suddenly, looking at Christine with some subtle meaning that I could not comprehend.

Again she paid not the slightest attention, but turning fiercely upon me as she drew the shrinking Maria towards her, she continued haughtily—

“As for your base and unmanly threats and insinuations against this innocent child, I need say no more than that Mr Langworthy shall hear of them in due time and will deal with you as you deserve. Come, Maria!”

Even then, after all that I had allowed myself to say and think, Maria cast one swift, appealing, pitiful glance in my direction.

“Harry is dead—dead!” she moaned. “Oh, Christine, I cannot stay here! I am afraid—I am not safe! How and why was I brought to this room to-night? Oh, father, my father! what will happen to me? Honoria, you at least are good and kind. Protect me and take me home!”

Meantime, Pennifeather had edged himself between

Christine and Maria, watching, as I thought, with great wariness.

"I approve," he said shortly. "She must on no account be left here. Cover her up with rugs and we shall remove her at once. Will you show us out, Miss O'Mara?"

"Maria must remain!" she responded vehemently. "What can harm her in her own house?"

"Perhaps Mike might get at her," he returned with seeming flippancy.

This time the shaft really struck home, for she winced and sprang back with a look of mingled terror and rage.

"Now," said Pennifeather, "I give you one last chance. Tell me where she is concealed, or I search the house!"

In a moment she had sprung to the wall, her hand upon an electric bell.

"If you dare to move from here, except to leave the house," she hissed venomously, "I shall rouse the entire household. It will hardly be to the interest of any of you to bring a crowd of witnesses to this scene!"

"I want to go; I am afraid to stay! Honoria, take me away!" Maria murmured again.

Pennifeather stood, biting his lip in undecided perplexity.

"You found your way in here unasked," Christine added in a commanding tone. "You have no right to remove that child from her father's roof; and if you do so, you will have to reckon with him. He does not always come off second-best, Mr prying Pennifeather!" she added, with a baleful glance.

"Let him look to the tell-tale fastenings of his abode!" Pennifeather answered significantly. "Come, let us go!"

And so we went, Honoria and Pennifeather supporting Maria, while I stumbled on in my blindness beside them, a broken and despairing man, thinking ever, in a hazy disconnected fashion, of the last glimpse of Christine O'Mara, standing at the door watching our retreating figures with a fixed, resolute, unbending, and malevolent eye.

"I am truly sorry for you," said Pennifeather after we had departed from the house where Maria had found temporary refuge. "This was not the discovery that I anticipated. But be of good courage! Try to sleep to-night! All may yet be well!"

Sleep! Sleep is for the beloved of the Lord; not for brain-racked, heart-tortured, miserable, forsaken, befooled wretches such as I! Oh! the weary, leaden hours, the burning head, the fever-laden body! Rest and sleep will never come again, never but in the grave! Bereft of the human-hearted friend I loved, betrayed by him, and by the mistress dearer to me than my heart's blood, who is the mocking fiend that dare suggest that peace and contentment may ever visit me in this world again?

BOOK III.

THE MARTYRDOM OF MARIA.

CONTRIBUTED BY HORATIO PROUDLY.

“Man, proud man!

Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven
As make the angels weep!”

—*Measure for Measure*, Act II. Sc. ii.

CHAPTER I.

A DECLARATION : AND A CONSULTATION.

I HAVE been asked to contribute, for the benefit and enlightenment of the public and towards the expiscation, so far as in my power lies, of the remarkable and mysterious occurrences with which this record is concerned, an amplification of the notes taken at the time in connection with the proceedings with which I was professionally and personally concerned in that regard. True it is that there has been conveyed to me by some of my one-time friends a gentle pique or suggestion that I should refrain from redundancy or embellishment ; and, indeed, it may well be that certain felicities of style in composition, admired by critics, perhaps too partial—including in that number my dear Honoria, once M'Skimming, and now, for the last half-dozen years or more, Proudly—I say these felicities of style may be more appropriately applicable to such purposes as the drafting of a Minute of Admissions by which no admission is made, or the Adjustment of Issues tending only to their confusion ; but I shall do my best to adapt myself to my unaccustomed surroundings. Once, at a public meeting, I remember hearing a town councillor, who was by trade a plasterer, ask forbearance for any defect in his oration on the plea that his past career had qualified him better for the scaffold than the platform ; and, *mutatis mutandis*, I confess to feeling myself *in pari casu* with that self-abnegating gentleman. With this short and simple apology, I proceed to my allotted task.

Never, in my recollection, was profounder sensation created in the west end of Edinburgh than when it was whispered that the engagement between Hamish Stuart—then easily the leading man among the junior counsel at our Bar—and the charming Miss Maria Langworthy had been broken off. Soon the whisperings grew to murmurs, and the murmurs swelled to loud-voiced rumours. Harry Haviland was dead, and Hamish Stuart was down with brain-fever. These were certainties. Wild conjectures as to the meaning of it all were noised abroad, and, when it was known at last that Maria Langworthy had been arrested on a sheriff's warrant, charging her with the murder of Harry Haviland by poison, public curiosity and excitement ran riot. The grief-stricken parent, Mr Christopher Langworthy, shut himself up in his lonely mansion in Queen Anne Square, refusing to see any one but his solicitor, Mr Poole, and by his special instructions Robert Montgomery, then a comparatively untried man, was retained for the defence of Maria. It was in vain that Montgomery, with his usual sturdy sense and retiring modesty, suggested that the Dean of Faculty or some other leader should be taken in as his senior. On that matter, Mr Poole, acting for his client, was impervious as adamant. Montgomery was to be allowed to choose a junior if he pleased, who would be duly instructed, but the brunt of the defence was to be borne by him alone. I can never be sufficiently grateful that he ultimately chose me, because, in spite of the verdict that was returned, our conduct of that memorable case laid the foundation on which has subsequently been built the superstructure of any little success that I have since achieved.

It is perhaps not generally realised south of the Tweed that we in Scotland live in a region where coroner's inquests and public magisterial inquiries are alike unknown. It is unnecessary, and here it would be inappropriate, to contrast the two systems of criminal procedure. Suffice it to say generally that with us all prosecutions in the Superior Courts are conducted by Crown officials: preliminary investigations are held in private, and the jury have neither the advantage nor

the disadvantage of knowing anything of the evidence till they hear it in court for the first time.

At the period of which I speak, however, there lingered a practice much liable to abuse, which now, I am glad to say, is in process of dying a natural death. Immediately after his apprehension an accused person was, quite properly, carried before a magistrate—usually the sheriff-substitute of the county—and given a private opportunity of making a statement, or “emitting a declaration,” as it was called. He was warned that anything he might say would be used against him at his trial—though, oppressively enough, it could not be used in his favour—and his statement was written down. When it is remembered that at this stage an unhappy prisoner was not allowed the benefit of any advice, professional or otherwise, it is easy to appreciate how this seemingly harmless observance might, in the hands of an astute and zealous public prosecutor, be transformed into an engine of oppression, and such cases were far too common. It is true that disapproval of this kind of conduct was expressed in a half-hearted way from time to time, and now and then eminent Crown counsel refused to make use of these cunning traps set for unwary prisoners; but it was not till the year 1887 that the system was slightly modified. Soon we shall see the sensible reform of a prisoner giving evidence, if he so desire, at his own trial, and when that day arrives declarations, as at present understood, will become things of the past.¹

I have been led into this seeming digression by the fact that, with one or two exceptions, the declaration taken from the unhappy Maria Langworthy was perhaps the most appallingly inquisitorial and unfair document ever prepared for use in a Scottish court of justice. In spite of the reasonable protests of her counsel, it was remorselessly relied upon, both by the Crown and the Judge, at the trial. It is thus public property, and so I make extracts from it here, subject to and supplemented by certain descriptive particulars received from an

¹ Mr Proudly's prognostications have now been fully realised. Prisoners are entitled to decline to make declarations, and almost invariably do so decline. They are now entitled to give evidence.

assistant sheriff-clerk, who was present. It begins thus:—

“*Edinburgh, 27th June 18—*. . . . Compeared a prisoner . . . who . . . Declares: My name is Maria Langworthy, 19 years of age, a native of Scotland, residing at 101 Queen Anne Square, Edinburgh, of no business or profession, unmarried. I knew the deceased Harry Haviland, and had known him for seven or eight years. I last saw him alive late on the night of 9th June current, in the music-room of my father’s house. There had been a social gathering there, and when it was over we went on to a ball given by my father in the Assembly Rooms, George Street. Mr Haviland did not accompany us to the ball. I do not know where he went, or whether he remained in the music-room, but I think not. I have no special reason for saying that I think not, except that it appears to me unlikely. I cannot say why it appears to me unlikely.”

I pause here to point out that, to any one accustomed to reading transcripts of evidence, the import of these last sentences is unmistakable. They are obviously answers to questions put by a hostile examiner for the purpose of laying a foundation for some interrogation of vital importance, meantime held in reserve. And so they turned out. The declaration then proceeds:—

“At the ball, I spent most of the time with Mr Hamish Stuart, Advocate, to whom I am engaged to be married. About twelve midnight I left the ballroom for about half an hour. *Interrogated*. Where did you go?”

Here the declarant, according to my informant, became much distressed, and asked the presiding sheriff, in a startled voice, whether she must answer. The sheriff inclined his head gravely.

Again, at the risk of appearing unduly critical, I cannot resist recording my protest. The whole proceeding was irregular and improper. The public prosecutor should not have been allowed to put questions at all; and the sheriff should have replied that the prisoner was free to speak or remain silent. This was afterwards laid down most emphatically by pre-eminent authority in a subsequent case at a Circuit

Court in Inverness. However, Maria, under the promptings of the alert and inquisitive procurator-fiscal, went on with her disclosure.

"I went home alone. My reason was that I had suddenly discovered that I had left my engagement ring on my dressing-table. I went to fetch it. I entered by the side door, went through the music-room, and ascended by a lift to the first floor. I saw no one in the music-room. It was dark, but two fires were burning, dying down. I did not turn on the electric light. I went to my dressing-room, obtained my ring, and returned. *Interrogated.* Did you see any one in the house? *Answer.* No. *Interrogated.* Or hear any one?"

Here Maria paused once more, and then answered in a low tone of voice that she had heard her cousin, Christine O'Mara, sobbing in her room, and thought she heard another voice, a gruff voice, also, speaking angrily; that she knocked at the door, and Christine unlocked and opened it, explaining that she was suffering from neuralgia, that she was in a dressing-gown, but had evidently not been in bed, as she had not taken down her hair, and that there was no one else in the room.

"I went back to the ball," the declaration continues, "and told my father what I had seen and heard. I did not see Mr Haviland from the time I left the Assembly Rooms till I returned."

Then the public prosecutor produced, with a flourish, a bundle of letters—three of them, two with envelopes and one without—and slapped them down on the table.

"Now," said he, "look at the first of these letters. Is that in your handwriting?"

"It is," said Maria; "I wrote this on Saturday, 10th June, the day after the ball, and handed it to Mr Hamish Stuart for delivery to Mr Haviland."

"Look at the first sentence: 'Dearest Harry, you misbehaved dreadfully last night, but I forgive you,' and so on. To what does that refer?"

"To his failure to come on to the ball," she answered.

Then, to quote the *ipsissima verba* of the declaration once more :—

“*Interrogated.* I suggest that they refer to something that took place when you met Mr Haviland in the music-room that night after you had left the ball, as you say, for half an hour? *Answer.* But I did not meet Mr Haviland then—I have already said so. *Interrogated.* Look at the next envelope, bearing the post-mark date 11th June 18—? *Answer.* I wrote that envelope address in the music-room on that Sunday in the presence of Mr Hamish Stuart and others. *Interrogated.* Please read the letter it contains.”

Maria began to do so, calmly enough; but, in an instant, she looked up with startled, horror-stricken eyes, while a burning blush overspread her cheeks and neck.

“How dare you show me such words?” she panted. “How dare you? This is not the letter I wrote that day. I don’t understand the meaning of it. I should die of shame to use such language to any man!”

Most unfairly, the only record of this indignant repudiation is: “*Answer.* I did not write that letter. I never saw it before.”

I pause once more to say that we had here to deal with the most peculiar problem in this case, unexampled for its perplexity and difficulty. The letters were all on Maria’s notepaper, in her handwriting, and signed by her pet name “Min.” I am thankful that it is unnecessary to do more than refer to them in general terms; for the second and third, short as they were, were couched in the most glowing terms of ardent, passionate, and, I regret to say, almost certainly abandoned love. Their language, expression, and tone were indeed of such a nature that it was morally impossible for any one who knew her to believe for an instant that they had emanated from the pen of Maria. It is true that the first letter, actually read out by Maria before being despatched, was capable of innocent explanation; but, taken in connection with the other two, it assumed a veiled meaning and importance, whose sinister inference it was difficult indeed to countervail.

Patience fails me as I follow, on the document before me, the suggested motives and the unworthy imputations with which the public prosecutor was permitted to assail the shrinking prisoner; but it is almost necessary to quote the last question of this insinuating, zealous, fair-minded official, bent on obtaining a "free and voluntary" explanation from the frenzied woman. She had said that she had not seen Haviland on the night of the ball, and had not written the letters, and that should have been sufficient. But he was actually allowed to put this question, to which indeed he had manifestly been leading up from the start: "After reading the second letter, do you still adhere to your interpretation of the word 'misbehaviour' in the first letter?" To which the prisoner replied: "I have told you that I did not write the second letter, and can give no further answer or explanation."

To the rest of the examination no great objection can be taken. On the night of Haviland's death Maria said she had gone to bed at ten o'clock, and knew nothing further till she awoke in the music-room to find Honoria M'Skimming bending over her, and Stuart and Pennifeather standing beside them; and she acknowledged that she frequently purchased arsenic for the exotic flowers that flourished in the music-room. She knew nothing of a hypodermic syringe said to be used by Mr Haviland. She had never used such a thing herself.

All this was read over to her and signed as true, "as she should answer to God," and so came to an end an inquisition which sounded the knell of prisoners' declarations in Scotland. We had no means of discovering what she had said till fifteen days before the trial, but I have narrated it here for the sake of continuity and chronological accuracy.

Within a week she was committed for trial on a charge of murder; and, shortly thereafter, Montgomery and I held our first consultation with Mr Poole in Robert's chambers.

The Writer to the Signet was looking old and worn, the elasticity gone from his step, his eye more watery,

and his voice less mellow ; his very whiskers seemed not quite so bushy and aggressive as in former times, as he sat blinking at us in uneasy solemnity. Robert's face was white and drawn, for grief and anxiety had left their marks upon him—grief for the loss of his friend, anxiety for the fate of Stuart, whose life was, even then, hanging by a thread, and, above all, deep and foreboding anxiety and grief on account of the disastrous stroke that had involved the fate not only of Stuart, but of the fair young girl, in whose purity, innocence, and truth he believed with an unwavering and abiding trust.

Few of us will ever see another Robert Montgomery. There were giants in those days, it is true, but he o'er-topped them all. It was not so much his deep and wide erudition in legal lore, for the veriest journeyman amongst us can, and, if he is an honest man, must, plod diligently through Stair, and Erskine, and Bell, and the Law Reports. Woe to the man at the Bar of Scotland who trusts to the beating of the big drum, to a front and lungs of brass, and the arrogance and self-sufficiency which has never experienced a wisdom greater than his own ! Nor was it only Robert's literary attainments, conspicuous as they were, which gained for him the illustrious position that he attained in the end. He possessed the most orderly as well as the best balanced mind I ever knew. Mastering with infinite pains and patience every salient fact and minute detail, he was able in a moment to marshal them all in their order of importance, leading up to his masterly conclusion, the legal proposition which he had formulated in his own mind, and which, at the height of his great argument, he drove home with irresistible force. Added to all this, he was a man of singular simplicity of disposition, never imputing motives, devoted to his duty, and willing to believe that his opponents were actuated only by the same desire ; but, once convince him to the contrary, let him see that he was to be met with the unchivalrous weapons of cheating and chicanery, and he became an avenging power, whose very frown seemed to blast the wretched puny creatures who had dared to use against him artifices so contemptible.

On the day in question, he greeted Mr Poole and myself with his usual courtesy, and, motioning us to chairs, began by asking the solicitor how Mr Langworthy was bearing up under the unexpected blow.

"I have just left him," Mr Poole returned. "He is a changed man, and somewhat difficult to understand. He charged me with a message to you in the first place," and here he blinked with something of his old patronising stare at Robert.

"And that was?" Robert asked.

"I don't know what it means; but, for greater accuracy, he wrote it down. His words are these"—and he put on his gold-rimmed glasses to read, "'I must have it back; it is a matter of life and death that I have it back this week, to be returned without fail next week.'"

Looking over to Robert in some surprise at this cryptic communication, I saw him absently tear the paper into shreds, which he threw in the fire.

"Tell Mr Langworthy," he said slowly, "that I possess nothing belonging to him, and fail to understand his meaning."

"Is that all?" inquired the Writer to the Signet blankly.

Robert nodded gravely.

"And now," he went on, dismissing that subject, "please tell me more of Mr Langworthy. He is not a man to be so overwhelmed that he cannot think acutely. What explanation does he suggest of these horrors?"

"He offers no explanation. He contents himself with affirming that Maria cannot possibly be convicted; but, in the event of a miscarriage of justice——"

"Well?" Robert prompted; "in the event of a miscarriage of justice?"

"It sounds so preposterous that I hardly care to repeat it," said Mr Poole, with a perplexed frown, "but in such an event, his advice is 'rely on Pennifeather!'"

"Ah!" exclaimed Robert, drawing his breath sharply.

"Pennifeather!" continued the solicitor in disgust, "the man he dislikes and mistrusts, whom he desired

me to hound out of Edinburgh! It seems to me like lunacy!"

I confess that the suggestion made much the same impression on myself; but, after his first involuntary exclamation of surprise, Robert seemed to take it quite seriously, and even made a note of it in a book lying on his desk.

"Let us hope," he said, with the ghost of a smile, "that we shall not be reduced to such straits as that! Anything else?"

"He suggested," the solicitor replied haltingly and apologetically, "that I should obtain further assistance."

"You mean that you should take in a leader?" cried Robert heartily: "I am delighted to hear it!"

"No! no!" protested the other. "On that point he is quite firm. Unless Maria insists, no one shall plead her cause but you. But this kind of thing is not quite in my line. Why should I conceal from you that I, who never was inside of a criminal court in my life, feel myself absolutely unfit, by temperament or experience, for an unaccustomed duty? What Mr Langworthy desires is that I should take into my service, as temporary clerk, a man whom he can thoroughly recommend to do the work necessary for getting up the defence."

Poor Mr Poole looked anything but happy as he made this confession, but brightened up with evident relief when Robert assented cordially to the suggestion.

"This is not a time," Robert remarked, "to stand on the punctilio of professional etiquette. I should jump at the proposal if I were you. Anything more?"

"He also desires," the other continued, "to have a personal interview with his daughter at the earliest possible moment; and makes a great point that he shall see her alone, before either of us has an opportunity of speaking to her."

"Naturally!" Robert assented; "and now that she has been committed for trial, that can be easily arranged. I suppose," he continued, turning to me, "that they have taken one of their infernal declarations from her?"

I replied that I so understood, but had been refused

permission to see it, though I had applied to the advocate-depute.

"Then they are afraid!" cried Robert triumphantly. "Come! that's not so bad! So we are to be kept in the dark till the indictment is served! Well, we shall hurry them up a bit. Prepare a petition for Maria to run her letters!"

"You really must forgive me," said Mr Poole nervously, "but I am so rusty in these matters! What does that mean?"

"Merely that we can compel them to bring on the trial and finish it within a limited period," I replied. "It is our equivalent of the *Habeas Corpus*."

"Is it agreed that that shall be done?" asked Robert, rising. "Well and good! Then I cannot usefully detain you longer, Mr Poole. Tell Mr Langworthy to be of good heart. I shall arrange for his interview with Maria to-morrow, and do you send that new assistant to me so soon as he arrives!"

Mr Poole hesitated for a moment or two.

"You will not alter your determination?" he asked.

"In what regard?"

"In regard to the message I am to deliver in response to the request to have 'it' back."

Robert shook his head decidedly and emphatically.

"Then, in that event only, I was to give you this letter."

So saying, he handed a sealed envelope, which Robert opened, and read its contents with great care. Then he handed the letter to me, saying—

"There must be the utmost confidence between Proudly and myself. Tell Mr Langworthy that I have shown this in your presence."

The communication was in these, to me incomprehensible, terms:—

"My life work is over. The operations which I have conducted for years, with a single eye to British fair play, are to be brought to a close. This will leave me *pro tem.* a comparatively poor man. If I am to have a free hand to save Maria I must have you know what, delivered me personally by Poole. I cannot safely put

pen to paper. Don't be a damned conscientious stubborn fool. Give it up."

"Tell Mr Langworthy," said Robert calmly, "that the answer is no! Such a request, if repeated, will necessitate his changing his counsel. One moment, however," he added thoughtfully. "Do you trust your client, Mr Poole?"

"Trust Mr Langworthy? My dear sir," quoth that worthy, opening his eyes at the sheer audacity of the question, "with untold gold! Why, that man is worth, at the present moment—but that is betraying professional confidence!"

"In a general way, I suppose," said Robert, "he has large sums at current account at his bank?"

"He has very large sums at current account in several banks."

"Ha!" said Robert. "Now, would you care to advance, say——"

"Advance money to Mr Langworthy?" laughed the Writer to the Signet with genuine amusement. "Coals to Newcastle!"

"How are his cheques signed?" asked Robert, thoughtfully rubbing his chin.

"Always with a special initial in addition to the signature."

"And if that initial were not there the bank would not honour the cheque, eh?"

"It would be sent for inquiry."

"Then," said Robert, "this is important! You will go to-morrow and ask from Mr Langworthy written authority to the bank to cash his cheque for £9500, without the initial, and signed on a blank cheque written out and stamped on an ordinary sheet of paper. But no one must be present, neither servant, Christine, nor any one else, and the money must be handed to him in notes, just as secretly."

"But, good God! why?" inquired the astonished attorney.

"That is what I can only guess; but that is what Mr Langworthy wants," returned Robert, and he tapped the letter in his hand. "For some secret purpose he

must have £9500 at once in cash, and Maria's safety may depend upon it. That cheque, remember, is to be kept separate from the others by the bank, and not returned in the usual bundle."

"I fail to comprehend the significance of it all," said the Writer to the Signet, rising and seizing his hat; "but my instructions from my client are to be guided entirely by you. Rightly or wrongly, you shall be implicitly obeyed."

And he bowed rather stiffly as he betook himself off.

"Don't ask me what it all means, Proudly," said Montgomery wearily when we were alone: "I am almost as much in the dark as you. But we cannot afford to leave a stone unturned. We must take even hopeless chances."

As he spoke his clerk threw open the room door once again, and announced—

"Mr Pennifeather!"

CHAPTER II.

PENNIFEATHER PROFFERS AN EXPLANATION; AND MARIA KEEPS, WITHOUT ENLIGHTENING, HER OWN COUNSEL.

THERE was neither languor nor lassitude in the demeanour of the man who now stood before us. He shook hands with us both silently, and then, seating himself in front of the fireplace, pulled out a disreputable old pipe, which he proceeded methodically to fill with tobacco.

"First of all," he said, "Stuart has turned the corner. The crisis is past, and I have just left the nursing-home."

"Thank God!" cried Robert fervently.

"Next," Pennifeather continued, "when are you to see Maria? It is imperative that you should do so before that man in Queen Anne Square gets her ear."

Robert looked rather disturbed, as he explained that he had just agreed that Mr Langworthy should be the first to visit Maria.

Pennifeather struck a match on his boot with an angry snap.

"At his request, I suppose?" he interrogated, suspending the match in the air.

"Yes."

"Damn!" said Mr Pennifeather, lighting his pipe. "Then don't let him see her alone! Arrange that the governor, or a warder, or the matron shall be present. If possible, let him be searched before he goes in, and have her searched immediately he leaves! Her life depends on it."

Again the contemplative Robert looked gravely disturbed, almost angry.

"I don't like these suggestions, Pennifeather," he said. "No doubt you have some ground for your suspicions, but forgive me for saying that these vague hints disquiet without assisting me. This is a time for straight speaking. We are retained to defend on a charge of murder, and if you have any facts, as opposed to conjectures, that will aid us in that defence, I shall be glad to listen. It is impossible, and doubly dangerous, to attempt to work in the dark. You agree, Proudly?"

"Certainly," I responded.

"It is only natural and proper," Robert continued, "that her father should desire to see Maria as soon as possible. I cannot interfere with either his discretion or hers in the matter."

Pennifeather smoked savagely for a time.

"Don't neglect my warning, then!" he said at last. "As surely as I sit here, I solemnly believe that Haviland was done to death, at the instigation, and with the connivance, of the man in Queen Anne Square!"

"Great heavens!" I exclaimed, "what do you mean?"

"Proudly is not aware," Robert observed, "of your—er—peculiar views about Mr Langworthy, which I shall explain to him afterwards. But you must be more explicit. If we are to say that Maria is innocent because her father is guilty, we must peril our case upon that special defence, and give notice of it. It cannot be sprung upon the Court like the surprise packet of a melodrama, and we dare not try it and fail."

"So far as I have got," said Pennifeather, sitting back and thrusting his hands in his pockets, "the matter stands thus. Haviland saw more, and knew more, of the scene in the train than he admitted. He all but confessed as much to me; and, you remember, he sent for me on his deathbed, without being able afterwards to reveal the purpose of the message."

"Suppose we grant that," said Robert, "although there is nothing to prove it, what then?"

"It was therefore for the interest of James Langworthy—for, whatever you may say or think, the man is James and not his brother—to put Haviland out of the way. I believe the first attempt was made on the

night of the ball, when we thought Haviland drunk. Maria also stands in James Langworthy's path. Not only might she dispossess him at any moment, were the truth to come to light, but he is evidently under some sort of compulsion to leave his money past her at his death, and he now knows that to be impossible, should she survive. Hence he has, with his usual diabolical cunning, arranged that suspicion should fall on her, and he thus rids himself of two dangers at one blow."

"Then by what agency do you suggest that Harry really met his death?" I inquired.

"Do you remember, Montgomery," Pennifeather went on, "the wild words of Haviland, when Stuart asked him where he had been on the night of the ball?"

"Something about scaling the heights of Elysium, or nonsense of that kind. But poor Harry had been drinking."

"Don't believe it! I thought at the time, and still think, he was under the influence of some drug, a deliriant intoxicant, as the worthy police surgeon said on the night of Haviland's death. On that night, his raving—if it was raving—had method in it. Stuart was to burn the letters, and I wish to heaven he had, without consulting that pragmatistical ass, the doctor! because Maria was chaste as ice and pure as snow, but he spoke of a woman, the woman of his dream—what dream? what woman?"

"Yes, yes, go on!" cried Robert, now for the first time showing interest.

"The woman who was Merelli's companion in the house in Mayfair was a wonderful creature with red-gold hair falling in loose profusion down almost to her shoulders. Haviland saw precisely such a vision in the railway carriage in company with the man of Queen Anne Square. Does that not give us some clue?"

"But Mr Langworthy says he never saw the woman that was in the railway carriage before or since," expostulated Robert.

"But can you doubt that she was the 'woman of his dream' that Harry spoke of on the fatal night? My belief is that he wanted to tell me who James Lang-

worthy's companion was. He knew her, and he had seen her here in Edinburgh the night he died."

"Certainly he confessed that he remembered nothing of his doings in London," Robert mused, "for ten days before the accident."

"He said so?" shouted Pennifeather. "Then my surmise is correct. He recognised her in the train, and he met her here. She was the 'woman of his dream' of whom he raved."

"But no such person was ever seen in Queen Anne Square!" Robert objected.

"But she was seen in Edinburgh!" cried Pennifeather triumphantly. "On the night of Haviland's funeral, little Mike saw her at the grave alone, weeping bitterly. He knows Maria and Christine. It was neither of these; but he followed her to the lane of Queen Anne Square."

"And who is she, then?"

Pennifeather shrugged his shoulders.

"She is a creature of James Langworthy, brought down here as a decoy, and smuggled away when her purpose was accomplished. Now, his one endeavour is that Maria shall not escape. He foresees a possible Scotch verdict of 'not proven,' and knowing what that would mean to her, he may provide her with means of self-destruction."

"But all this," Robert objected once more, "is wholly inconsistent with his conduct, as I know it, even with the solicitude which he is exercising now."

Pennifeather smote his hand on the table.

"Why, may I ask with all deference, does he insist upon her defence being conducted by comparatively inexperienced men? Is that the solicitude of an anxious father? And he intends to flee, mark that! He is busy closing the avenues of possible pursuit. He has repaid me my money, as well he might, out of his brother's millions; and, only the other day, some anonymously generous person provided Poole with a sum of £12,500, recovered from the price of the Raeburns, with which to satisfy the creditors on the Glenvorlich estate. That I know to be a fact."

"All that you have said," observed Robert in his most practical matter-of-fact voice, "may be very interesting, but, so far as we are concerned, it is useless—conjecture and nothing more. If we were to trot out this mythical lady, Merelli's mistress, whom Harry is supposed to have seen for the space of a flash of lightning in a railway train, and nobody has seen within a hundred miles of this city since, we should most deservedly be laughed out of court. In the next place, why should not Mr Langworthy, out of sheer goodness of heart, retrieve his brother's misdeeds by reimbursing those whom he defrauded? Who is to say that he had any cause to fear Haviland? The whole theory, my dear Pennifeather, rests on no solid foundation. We must work on practical lines. No, no, it won't do!"

Pennifeather sat gnawing his moustache.

"But I know that I am right, all the same!" he muttered.

Robert rose wearily and began to pace the floor.

"We must first have the facts, and all that the Crown witnesses are going to say," he said. "An experienced clerk from Poole's will do what is necessary, under my direction, immediately that the indictment and Crown list of witnesses are served on our client. As at present advised, however, Proudly and I are of opinion that there is one crucial point on which the prosecution must fail. That is so, Proudly, is it not?"

"But that," I returned, "would not mean a triumphant acquittal, merely a verdict of 'not proven.'"

"If we obtain an acquittal," said Robert drily, "we can do without the triumph."

"Well! I am going to see this thing through!" said Pennifeather, reaching for his hat and stick. "You must go your own way and I shall go mine; but I have a small rod in pickle for Mr James Langworthy yet!"

"For Heaven's sake do nothing rash!" Robert protested, as he accompanied our visitor to the door.

"Rather a dangerous theorist, don't you think?" he asked quaintly, on his return, "this Pennifeather?"

"This Pennifeatherhead!" I retorted forcibly. "The man is an interfering ass!"

But Pennifeather's interference was to bear unexpected fruit in the end.

In the course of a few days, the meeting between Mr Langworthy and his daughter took place in the Calton Jail; and, on the following afternoon, Robert Montgomery and I also betook ourselves to that unhappy place. It was with difficulty that I could restrain my emotion when Maria was brought to the bare white-washed room where we were awaiting her, by a kind-faced matron, who afterwards considerably retired out of hearing. I know that my eyes smarted as I looked at that fair fragile figure. Robert, too, was very pale, but very pitiful, holding out his hands to the shrinking girl who approached so timidly. Ah! what a change was there! No coy glance or wayward smile, but a beautiful sad little face, refined and purified by suffering, was held up to his, as he stooped and, with grave brotherly affection, imprinted a kiss upon her brow. She was dressed in a simple black gown, with snowy wrist-bands and collar, her glossy hair smoothed down, parted in the middle, and gathered into a loose coil on her neck. Wistful and grief-stricken as she appeared, it was not the change that startled me so much as an unmistakable likeness. There could be no doubt about it now. Except that her eyes were larger, greyer, and farther apart, and that there was no brooding sullenness there, she appeared to me the living image—a fair-haired, sweet-tempered edition—of Christine O'Mara!

Her first thought was of Hamish.

"How is he to-day?" she asked, still holding Robert by the hand.

"Better, I am glad to say."

She sighed contentedly and smiled. Then her face clouded over.

"He thinks me a guilty wretch! Poor, mistaken, unhappy Hamish!"

"In his heart of hearts," Robert comforted her, "he longs and prays to believe in your innocence."

"I do not blame him, or bear him anything but the purest affection," she said simply. "I understand things

now as I never did before; and I know how difficult—how impossible—it must be for such a man to disbelieve his own senses! But I am innocent, Robert!” she continued, steadily, almost proudly. “If you, too, doubt, as Hamish does, please leave me now to tread my dreary path alone!”

She was by far the calmest of the three of us, as Robert responded, in tones broken by fervent emotion—

“No doubt can ever dim my faith! Through good report and evil report, though all men should assail you, I would stake my life, my dear! my dear! upon your purity and truth!”

After that we were silent for a little.

“Robert,” she said, in faltering tones that gradually became more distinct and self-possessed, “I do not know what wrong I have ever done, what sin I have committed, that this punishment should be visited upon me; and, were it not for my consciousness of having done no intentional evil, I could not bear the terrible disgrace that any one should believe that these shameful letters came from me. Oh! when I think of the leering manner of the man who questioned me at my declaration!” and here she broke down, hiding her face in her hands, and sobbing bitterly.

“The hound!” cried Robert, with a flaming face.

But her emotion passed away in time; and we began to converse more easily and naturally, Robert questioning her in detail, quietly, and with fatherly delicacy, in regard to her whole relationship with Harry. She answered with unreserved candour and frankness; but I could not help noticing that she seemed to avoid, as much as possible, all reference to her father or Christine, and that her mention of Harry’s name was always accompanied by a certain hesitancy, and an appearance of something like distaste, if not aversion. So remarkable was this that the keen-witted Robert observed it even sooner than I, as we discovered on comparing notes afterwards.

She explained that, on the fatal Sunday evening, she had dined alone, Christine having retired to her room

with one of her neuralgic headaches; that she had taken coffee sitting beside Christine's bed, and that, feeling strangely tired and drowsy, as had sometimes happened of late, she had gone to bed before ten o'clock, and knew no more till she awoke in the music-room.

"That man," she said, colouring slightly, "asked me something about a puncture mark on my wrist. I spoke to father about it yesterday, who seemed much disturbed; but I want you to believe that I never in my life took opium or any other kind of drug, in that or any other way."

"Then there was such a mark on your wrist?" Robert remarked thoughtfully. "Strange! Have you noticed anything of the kind before?"

"Once or twice!"

"And when that happened, had you ever awakened anywhere but in bed?"

"No," Maria answered; "but I have had strange dreams, about which I spoke to Hamish. Oh! Hamish! Hamish! Have you really gone from me for ever?" and she sobbed again.

"There! there!" said Robert, soothing her. "Don't distress yourself! When he is well enough, Hamish and I shall have a talk about many things! And now, one question more, and we have done for the day. When you saw your father yesterday, did he leave any message for me?"

She smiled the ghost of her old endearing mischievous smile.

"He did. He said that you were an unconscionable, conscientious scoundrel; but, thanks to your ready wit, all was well."

"I understand," returned Robert, "and am glad. But have you no more to say to me in consequence of your interview?"

Maria pondered for a little, clasping and unclasping her nervous, artistic, white fingers. Then, conquering her emotion and drawing herself up with dignity, she answered—

"My father is a good man, whom I trust, and whom

I shall obey. There is, indeed, something which I may not reveal now, not even to you. If I am to die, I must die with the word unspoken. He offered, if I so desired, to make the revelation now, be the consequences what they may; but I would not permit it, and the choice is mine. It is true that my father has enemies, of his own making perhaps, but he chose his own path. I know enough to be quite certain that, had he foreseen the death of Harry Haviland, he could and would have prevented it."

"You know, then, how Harry died?"

"I do!"

Great tears stood in Robert's eyes, and his face was working painfully.

"I speak," he said solemnly, "not as your friend——"

"My dear, dear friend!"

"—but as your counsel and adviser. If the murderer is one within your own knowledge—no matter who—it is your duty to yourself and to your country's justice to disclose the name, now! To-morrow may be soon enough, so far as he or she is concerned; but it may be too late to save you!"

I had been making notes of the conversation, and paused breathlessly for the reply, which came at last in tones of heart-breaking anguish.

"There was no murder! Harry Haviland died by his own hand!"

Robert threw up his arms in amazement.

"But you will not reveal the reason that causes you to say so?"

"It is not my secret," she whispered, with drooping head.

"Then," replied Robert, with deep emotion, "if I were only your counsel, I should walk out of that door and refuse to see you again; but, as I honour and reverence you as a loyal daughter and a steadfast enduring woman, I accept your assurance, in all unquestioning faith. We shall fight your cause with such weapons as you choose to furnish."

"I am afraid your time is up, gentlemen," said the kindly matron, looking in.

"Then farewell, Maria!" said Robert valiantly. "Be of good courage! Trust in God, and He will bless you!"

She gave us her hands, sweetly and graciously. Then she departed—her sorrowful face set and determined, but serene in its pale beauty, her step firm, and her shapely head held high.

WORKING MEN'S LIBRARY

CHAPTER III.

THE ADVENT OF ARTHUR MARSHALL.

THE appearance presented by the special assistant selected by Mr Langworthy to aid us in preparing for the forthcoming ordeal was not at first sight entirely prepossessing. An uncouth and ungainly giant, of husky voice and burly frame, whose clothes looked as though they had been thrown at him and stuck there somehow, he appeared the precise antithesis of the ferret-faced, quick-witted, acute-minded, dapper lawyer's clerk that one had expected to see. His eyes were concealed behind coloured spectacles with blinker-like flaps; his cheeks, all that could be seen of them, were lined and furrowed; his clean-shaven upper lip was long and straight, and his chin concealed by a scrubby grey beard. But when he smiled, which was but seldom, his mouth, crinkling into humorous lines, displayed two rows of strong white teeth, and his whole expression made one imagine that the eyes behind the glasses might possibly be kindly, and even merry.

On the evening of his arrival at Palace Street, he apologised for his personal appearance and slovenly toilet on the plea that he had recently come off a long journey; but, truth to tell, he never presented much improvement in that respect during the whole period of my intercourse with him.

I have been thus particular in describing this personage, not only because he turned out to be of the greatest possible assistance to us, but also because he succeeded in gaining the ear and confidence of Robert

Montgomery to such an extent in the interval that he was afterwards taken into that considerate gentleman's service as his personal clerk—a post which he continues to occupy with acceptance to this day.

After introducing himself by the name of Arthur Marshall, he presented a letter from Mr Poole, together with a characteristic epistle from Mr Langworthy, in these terms:—

“DEAR ROBERT,—The bearer may look rather a weird wild-fowl, but he is true as steel, silent as the grave, and possessed of intuitive powers of no mean order. He has initiative, but is obedient to instructions. Once made conversant with the duties you require of him, he will fulfil them to the letter. Don't be prejudiced by his eyes and voice. The latter he lost by residence in Demerara; the former he almost lost on the Himalayas. God bless you! and God defend the right!

CHRISTOPHER LANGWORTHY.

“P.S. — Keep Arthur Marshall and Pennifeather apart.
C. L.”

“These,” the newcomer whispered, after we had both perused the letters, “are my credentials. Now what am I to do first? I am entirely at your service.”

His accent, which I have some difficulty in describing, seemed to me to savour of the south of England, with a curious tang in it which I now understand to be characteristic of natives of Australia.

Robert informed him that his first duty would be to call upon all the Crown witnesses, a list of whom was printed at the end of the indictment, and obtain from each of them a statement of the evidence they proposed to give at the trial.

“In Scotland,” Robert explained, “every witness for the Crown is *ipso facto* a witness also for the prisoner; and although we are not allowed to see the ‘precognition’—as we call it conveniently—given to the other side, the witnesses themselves are bound to give us also a precognition if we so desire.”

"So I understood," the scarecrow returned, fumbling in his pockets; "and, to save time, I have already gone about that part of the business."

So saying, our visitor produced from a capacious wallet two bundles of papers, one of which he handed to each of us with an old-fashioned bow. It was certainly an agreeable surprise; for not only were we provided with duplicate copies complete of precognitions of all the Crown witnesses, done in typewriting—which was practically unknown in those days in legal circles—but also with a neat *précis* of the information collected, and suggestive comments and hints as to the weak and strong points of a possible defence.

"This is amazing!" said Robert, after skimming rapidly through the results of the old clerk's labours, who had meanwhile sat twirling his preposterous hat in his hands. "Mr Marshall, you are a marvel!"

He received the compliment with one of his unusual smiles.

"I write a sort of shorthand of my own," he explained, "which no lawyer's clerk could understand, and, as I sometimes amuse myself with a typewriting machine invented by a friend and sent to me on approval, I thought this a good opportunity of testing its powers."

But Robert was once more deep in the papers—"tearing the heart out of them," as he used to express it—murmuring at intervals, "Most suggestive," "Excellent," "A new light," and the like, while underscoring rapidly and making notes.

Meantime the scarecrow discarded his hat, and dived once more into his bulging pockets.

"I have perhaps anticipated your instructions," he began, "but it occurred to me that Mr Haviland took with him to North Berwick not only his personal luggage, but his bag of golf-clubs."

"The luggage has been overhauled," Robert answered, looking up from under his brows, "and nothing of importance discovered."

"But the bag of clubs has not."

Robert pushed aside the papers.

"Well?" he asked eagerly, "have *you* found anything?"

"It appears," hoarsely whispered Mr Marshall with tiresome deliberation, "that Mr Haviland took his golf-bag with him to his bedroom on the Saturday night, Mr M'George considerably brought it home, and, forgetting all about it, left it lying in the hall of his own house; so I took possession of it."

"Well?" cried Robert again, with some impatience.

"There was nothing in the bag itself except the clubs; but in the little pocket outside, along with two or three other golf-balls, I found——"

"What?"

"This!" he exclaimed in triumph, producing from inside of his coat one of those little note-books—"penny version books," as he called them—which Haviland used to carry about with him for the purposes of practice and improving his style in composition.

"On the last page," he said, "you will find presumably the final words that he ever wrote."

With trembling fingers Robert turned over the leaves of this touching memento of his dead friend; but, after several vain efforts to decipher the scrawling and almost illegible characters, gave it up with a sigh.

"I can make nothing of this!" he said regretfully.

The resourceful Mr Marshall came to the rescue—explaining, almost apologetically, that he was accustomed to that kind of work, and that he had "taken the liberty" of preparing two type-written copies, which he handed to us.

The elliptical and seemingly disconnected sentences conveyed little or no meaning to my slow-moving mind: "Fiercely burns thy wrath consuming, Circe, daughter of the sun! When did I write that? and why does her wrath consume me now? The agonies of unsatisfied remembrance that have confused my vain efforts at recollection ever since that dreadful crashing cataclysm return with overwhelming power. Who is Circe, and what the ingredients of her potion? The letters burn into my brain, in characters of fire, that

Maria is she. But it cannot be,—should I not have known, should memory not have awakened within me? Would that I could recall the vaguest hint of the place and time when first I knew the thrilling power. Somewhere, somehow, it has been with me once again, an essence, a delight, a spirit, a languorous temptation. Oh, the agonies of unsatisfied desire to taste again that Circean poison! Where was I—where? The key is in the letters. Angel or devil, I can resist no longer. The anguished longing for that divine enchantment thrills to my inmost heart. I go—I go—whither?”

There was dead silence in the room when we had finished reading this rhapsodical piece of self-revelation. The effect on Robert was painfully obvious. For the first time it seemed as if an uneasy doubt began to creep in and overshadow his hitherto steadfast buoyancy.

“The boy was evidently on the verge of a nervous collapse,” I ventured. “The train accident, the severe and constant strain of writing that opera, close attention, concentrated thought, excitement——”

I broke off lamely at sight of Robert’s hopeless misery.

“Why did you bring this to light now?” he cried. “It is damning—damning!”

And he bent over the type script, reading it again and again.

“At any rate, it shows,” I suggested, “that, when Haviland wrote that, even he could not bring himself to believe that the letters came from Maria.”

The old clerk cast at me a quick, searching, and almost grateful look.

“I may have been wrong,” he said humbly, “but I thought it best to let you know all that we have to contend against. For my part, that note-book suggests to me that the writer was either a dipsomaniac or a drug fiend.”

“Mr Haviland was no such victim,” said Robert haughtily.

“Do you for a moment believe that your client wrote the second and third letters?” asked old Marshall,

"I must disbelieve," answered Robert. "I cannot but disbelieve."

"Then they were written by some one else. By whom? The letter supposed to be received at North Berwick is without an envelope."

"But on Maria's notepaper, remember that," said Robert.

"Is your heart failing you?" our clerk cried, his voice becoming almost articulately clear in his agitation. "That! for the letters!" and he snapped his fingers. "Only one is genuine. The ambiguous—unfortunately ambiguous—tone of it acted as a suggestion to Haviland's distempered brain. Why should he not have forged these last two letters himself, in his disordered condition of mind? Something occurred on the night of the ball. Find out where he was at midnight, and you know where he met his death on the Sunday!"

"Set your wits to work then!" said Robert wearily. "This note-book has taken the heart out of me at present. Had it fallen into the hands of the other side in time, our chance of escape would have been small indeed. The *a priori* argument that Maria simply could not have put such words on paper satisfies you and me, Proudly, but we want something concrete for a jury. Were it not for the innate abiding conviction of Maria's innocence and purity," he added gloomily, "I could almost despair. This note-book must never see the light of day!"

"Don't destroy it, sir!" the old man admonished him. "Some day it may serve to confound the guilty," and he seized the book, hiding it in his breast.

"The letters! the letters!" Robert muttered again. "What evil fate caused Harry to preserve them?"

"Pooh!" cried the clerk, "the letters? forgeries! Allow me," and he went to the door and called Montgomery's clerk, who came in, wondering.

"Now observe!" said Mr Marshall, and he dashed off some words on a blank sheet of paper. "You have seen me write that? Yes! And of course you will know it again? Kindly initial it! Thanks!" and he bowed the astonished clerk out of the room.

"What have you been doing?" Robert inquired.

"Merely preparing evidence. Read that!" and he tossed to us a sheet of notepaper on which there now appeared in Maria's characteristic writing, "Dearest Harry,—How about the tragedy we were to write together?—Min."

"Marvellous!" I exclaimed. "Mr Marshall, this is a perfect, undetectable forgery."

"And once they talked of writing such a play," Robert observed. "Where did you learn that, Mr Marshall?"

The old clerk shook his head.

"I did not know; but, if so, does that not suggest that the letters might be Maria's contribution to the collaboration? A little note such as this might corroborate the story."

"Then do you mean to propose to me——" Robert began in tones of thunder.

"Far from it!" responded the other quickly. "I got your clerk in to be able to prove that the note I wrote is not in your client's handwriting."

"Ah!" said Robert, relieved, "we shall keep this. It may serve to mystify the so-called experts."

"The letters," said Marshall, as if summing-up, "must be explained away. My firm belief is that they may have been written by Haviland himself."

"But, as it is impossible to prove him to have been either mad or drunk, that will not do," said Robert decisively.

"Then they were sent to entrap him to his death by some woman, or some man."

"Some man!" exclaimed Robert, arrested by this new suggestion.

"Some man, who had reason to hate or fear him!"

Do what I would, my mind reverted to the notion of James Langworthy; but remembrance of Maria's revelation about her father's visit to the jail banished the thought almost unformed.

"By the way," the old clerk continued, "I see in the list of witnesses for the Crown the name of Charles Pennifeather. Must I call on him?"

Robert ran his pen absently through Pennifeather's name.

"No," he said shortly, "that will not be necessary."

"I have already encountered the gentleman," the old fellow croaked, "his business is the detection of fraud and forgery——"

Robert started slightly in surprise.

"Not the defence of one unjustly accused of murder. It would be well for him to remember that it is sometimes dangerous for fools to rush in, and the digging of pits for others is a disastrous game. 'He who pryeth into the clouds may be struck by a thunderbolt.'"

I could almost see his eyes flash behind the obscuring spectacles. Robert was on the point of demanding some explanation of this obviously rancorous observation, when the door opened, and Pennifeather himself rushed precipitately into the room.

Before a word was spoken, the three of us stood alone. I looked hastily round; but the old clerk had vanished.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE TRIAL.

"CALL the diet, Her Majesty's Advocate against Maria Langworthy," shouted the bewigged Clerk of the High Court of Justiciary; and the packed audience in the grim old building settled down to listen with greedy ears to the long-expected and much-discussed forthcoming revelations of decadent wickedness and mysterious crime in high society.

Already Lord Pittenweem had taken his seat on the bench, after swooping two ungainly bows at the up-standing counsel and jurors, in a manner so ludicrously reminiscent of Robert's impersonation that, even in these portentous surroundings, many could not forbear to smile. It was indeed an evil fate that designated that crabbed, decrepit, dyspeptic, despotic old personage for this delicate duty. The Court of Session happened to be in vacation, and for that reason, as well as on account of their reluctance to undertake an invidious and unwelcome task, the other Justiciary Lords had been only too pleased to yield to the scarcely veiled desire of Pittenweem to shine in a celebrated case; and thus he had been allowed to assume a responsibility which, least of all the Judges, was he fitted to sustain. Peace to his ashes! for he is gone; but the recollection of his unspeakable and unpardonable behaviour on these two momentous days still rankles like a festering sore.¹

Ardbuckle, the Solicitor-General, led for the Crown

¹ It is right to say that, as time went on, Mr Proudly found occasion to modify many of the views expressed in this and the succeeding chapters.

in the absence of the Lord Advocate. His meteor-like career, and the polished brilliancy of his silver-tongued eloquence are now alike forgotten. Had he not allowed himself to be led astray from the pedestrian paths of the law to the seductive pastures of party politics, he might have lived longer in men's memories, though he had shone less brightly in his lifetime. He was a man of many gifts and high promise which resulted in little; but he was possessed of an ardent, generous, and, to his intimates, even a lovable disposition, loathing the task now before him almost as much as he disliked the Judge before whom it was his misfortune to be compelled to appear.

Along with him, also instructed by the Crown Agent—with our friend the debonair and self-satisfied procurator-fiscal in attendance—was Bertram Golightly, the advocate-depute on the home circuit. If ever man belied his name it was Golightly, for he stamped and ramped and roared through his professional career with all the blind fury and enthusiasm of an enraged Highland bull.

On the other side of the table sat Robert and I. Mr Poole was behind us in a chair under the shadow of the bench, silent and subdued, listening patiently, but offering neither advice nor assistance; while old Arthur Marshall the clerk slunk about in the obscurity of the background, dark and inscrutable.

But now the loathsome trap-door was raised, and up the ominous staircase came Maria, accompanied by the comely matron of the jail. She looked about her distressfully, as if not realising where she was—as indeed she did not; but catching sight of the foreboding figure on the bench with his three-cornered hat—the Scottish equivalent of the black cap—already ostentatiously displayed on the desk convenient to his hand, she shivered slightly, cowering down beside her companion on the seat where she was guarded—this formidable malefactor!—by two stalwart policemen sitting with drawn truncheons, stolidly inattentive, and unashamed.

"Who appears?" inquired the Judge in his gruffest accents.

Robert explained that he and I attended on behalf of the prisoner.

"No senior counsel?" asked his lordship, with something like an anticipatory chuckle of delight.

"None, my lord."

"Aha!" with a long-drawn sigh that might have been sorrow, but was really relief. Then assuming a paternal aspect of hypocritical geniality, he continued—

"This is a most important cause for a man so young as Mr—er . . ."

"Montgomery," the Clerk of Court prompted.

"Montgomery," he echoed. "Let me give you a word of advice. Be very careful what you ask or say!" which, considering that up to that point Robert had neither asked nor said anything, seemed somewhat ultroneous to say the least of it.

"I shall in all things be guided, I trust, by an intelligent appreciation of my client's interests, my lord," Robert answered respectfully but quite composedly; and sat down.

This was hardly the spirit that Pittenweem had expected to inspire; and in his confused wonder he gave vent to something approaching a low whistle of surprise. The truth is that our beneficent and indulgent system, whereby every prisoner, rich or poor, is invariably defended by counsel in the High Court, had at that time led to the curious result that it frequently depended upon the idiosyncrasies of the presiding Judge whether some of them were defended at all. Young members of the Bar, with little knowledge or experience, suddenly pitchforked into the position of opposing on behalf of poor prisoners the highly-trained Crown lawyers, were only too glad to clutch at any proffered assistance from the Bench. Hence Pittenweem's usual method was to begin by cowing these young gentlemen into an amazed silence, and having, so to speak, put them in his pocket to start with, never to allow them to show their noses again during the whole course of the trial.

In Robert, however, he had met his match, and more.

"Maria Langworthy," the Judge shouted suddenly in wheezy gutturals, "Stand up! You have been served

with an indictment charging you with the crime of murder. How say you—are you guilty or not guilty?”

She looked appealingly to Robert, whose lips framed silently the words, “not guilty”; and in response to this gentle prompting, she dropped her pretty curtsy, simply and unaffectedly as though she had been introduced to the old gentleman in her own music-room, and answered in her clear bell-like treble, with scarcely a tremor—

“Not guilty, Lord Pittenweem!”

He fixed on her his beady little eyes, frowning ominously. Evidently satisfied, however, that no disrespect to his dignity had been intended, his face relaxed into a sour smile as he motioned to her to be seated, and, bending over his note-book to record the plea, he chuckled to himself—

“Is she trying to begowk a donnert old man next?”

Then the jury was balloted and sworn, and the trial began.

In Scotland we allow no opening speech to inflame the minds of the jury, nor do we explain to them, in high-flown language, all that we intend to prove, confusing their minds in the end as to what has been adumbrated by counsel and what has been established by evidence. Until the conclusion of the whole testimony, neither counsel nor Judge should speak one word on the subject to the jury at all,—a requirement that is not always present to the judicial mind, even in modern times.

There was some little delay about the calling of the first witness, the sheriff-substitute who had presided at the declaration; and, in the interval, many curious prying eyes were turned upon that piteous figure behind the bar. With the perfection of refinement and breeding which disdains, and indeed does not comprehend, consciousness of self, she remained indifferent to the inquisitive glances of the commenting spectators. Except for a natural nervousness, engendered by her unaccustomed surroundings, she showed no trace of feeling or terror, still less of indignation or anything

approaching flaunting effrontery. With proud humility she accepted the inevitable publicity quite courageously, just as she would have faced any other form of inevitable pain. There was no shame, for she knew that she had no cause for shame. There was no fear, for she was not afraid. Dressed in simple black, with some snowy, filmy substance about the white column of her throat, she sat there, the observed of all observers, looking like the picture of some young Puritan saint,—her great grey eyes, with their pencilled brows and long curling lashes, calmly observant of the scene in front of her, looking neither to left nor right, her delicate creamy complexion clear and serene as the peach-like skin of a child, and her masses of red-gold hair coiled on her neck, as when I saw her last. Surely no being more incongruous to her surroundings than this slight, sinuous, graceful virgin figure, ever stood in the dock, or sat at the bar of a court of justice.

Motioning to Arthur Marshall to come forward, Robert whispered some instructions in his ear. As the old man obeyed the summons, creeping crab-wise with bowed figure and averted head, I thought that the prisoner regarded him for an instant with a puzzled, almost startled expression; but at that moment the sheriff entered the box to be sworn, and her attention was diverted to the business of the day.

It fell to my lot to open the proceedings, by protesting against the declaration being received at all, on the simple ground that it bore, on the face of it, to have been the result of close examination of the accused, and therefore could not have been “emitted freely and voluntarily.”

Needless to say this frivolous objection, “which would never have been taken but by a young man wholly unacquaint with the daily practice of this country,” was repelled with ignominy.

Robert did not trouble himself much, either with the sheriff or the procurator-fiscal.

“What is your age?” he asked the former gentleman.

“Forty - five,” replied the functionary, in some surprise.

"And you know that the prisoner is nineteen?"

"Beyond pupillarity," the sheriff ventured to assert in a superior manner.

"But still requiring guardianship," retorted Robert, with rapier-like rapidity. "Did you advise her that she need not answer questions unless she pleased?"

"She answered freely and voluntarily," the other persisted, doggedly.

"So you say! Do you attach any meaning to that phrase? or does it, in your opinion, consist merely of words of style?"

"More or less," he admitted.

"And your own position in the matter is a pure formality, I suppose?" Robert returned swiftly. "As the declaration is admittedly to be used, let me call your attention to one passage. '*Interrogated*: Do you still adhere——?' and so on. Is that a method of which you approve for obtaining a free and voluntary statement?"

"Surely," old Lord Pittenweem here interrupted, "surely a man may freely and voluntarily adhere to a statement already made! That stands to reason."

Robert shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"Then 'freely and voluntarily' I shall trouble the learned sheriff no further," and he resumed his seat.

It may be well to explain that it is not my purpose here to give more than a few brief sketches of the day's proceedings, culled from my own note-book and recollection, with special reference, however, to the masterly handling of the witnesses by Robert Montgomery.

Frank M'George, the young man who had accompanied Haviland to North Berwick on the Tuesday, swore to the fact that, during the visit, Haviland was unlike himself, moody and depressed,—“distinctly off colour, and off his game as well,” as the witness described it—that he had received a letter on the Saturday morning, after which he seemed more preoccupied and restless than before, that he suddenly announced his intention of walking to Drem on the Sunday morning to take train thence to Edinburgh, promising to return on the Monday morning, that he refused M'George's offer to accompany

him to Drem, and went away, leaving his luggage and golf clubs in the hotel.

Robert's first question gave the key to his defence on this part of the case.

"Were you present when the letter was delivered to Haviland on the Saturday?"

"No. It came by post."

"How do you know that?"

"I assume it to be so."

"Did he," asked Robert, "show you the letter?"

"No. I saw him reading it at breakfast. He was down first, and was reading it when I went in."

"Did you see the envelope?"

"No."

"Was there an envelope?"

"There must have been if it came by post," said the puzzled M'George.

"But if it did not come by post," suggested Robert suavely, "there need not have been?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed M'George, who was a thoroughly good sort, "of course not! I never thought of that."

"Then, for anything you can say, may the letter that you saw him reading on the Saturday morning have been delivered by hand?"

"Quite!"

"Or produced out of his own pocket?"

"Certainly!"

"Or," casually and quickly, "written by himself for that matter?"

"For all that I saw."

And recollecting the advice of an old hand at the game, Robert, having obtained a good answer to a shaky question, shut up and sat down; while old Lord Pittenweem wrote it all out laboriously, with gnarled, cramped fingers, and thunderous gathering brows.

"One more question," Robert exclaimed starting up as if in afterthought. "During the week did Mr Haviland *write* any letters?"

"Not that I saw."

"Did he write anything?"

"On the Saturday night," replied M'George, after some reflection, "he refused to play picquet, and, while I was doing a game of patience, I noticed him jotting down something with pencil in a note-book, at intervals between pacing up and down the room."

"Where is that note-book?" cried Robert, in bland inquiry, looking, however, not at the witness, but at the counsel across the table.

"'Tis the first I have heard of it," muttered the Solicitor-General, growing red about the ears, as was his habit when annoyed—which was not seldom. Then, to my secret joy, he turned on the dapper procurator-fiscal, informing him in an undertone, but with incisive and extensive vocabulary, of his views as to his competency to hold the office even of a message-boy.

"Do *you* know where it is?" Robert asked of the witness, as old Arthur Marshall's hand stole involuntarily to his breast pocket.

"No," said M'George wonderingly, "I did not see it lying about. He may have taken it with him, or it might be in his luggage."

"Which was taken possession of by the procurator-fiscal?" Robert queried.

"I understand so."

"What became of his golf clubs and bag?" asked Robert suddenly.

Pittenweem snorted.

"I really don't remember," answered M'George. "I believe I took them home with me."

"Ha!" said Robert. "Then they have not been handed over. Have you made any examination of the bag?"

"No man," his lordship commented testily and overbearingly, "would think of keeping papers and note-books amongst golf clubs! You don't suggest anything so preposterous as that, Mr—er——?"

"Montgomery," the Clerk of Court prompted again.

"Humph!" quoth the Court ungraciously.

"Oh, but don't you know," cried M'George in cheerful expostulation, "Haviland was just the sort of chap to do that kind of thing!"

"What, sir?" shouted the Judge, drawing down his brows.

"What I mean is," the witness went on, somewhat crestfallen, "he was one of these writing fellows. He kept note-books in his pockets when we went for a walk, and I have even seen him shove them into a spare pair of boots now and again."

"Have you ever seen him put a note-book in his golf-bag?" inquired Robert.

"You're right, I have!" cried M'George, his face lighting up with sudden recollection. "On the morning we went to North Berwick he opened the little pocket outside to see if he had any spare golf-balls, and showed me, with a laugh, one of his 'inevitables,' as he called them, that he found there."

Again the Solicitor-General delivered a *sotto voce* oration for the sole benefit of the now disconsolate procurator-fiscal; and Robert, with a meaning glance at the jury, once more resumed his seat.

Lord Pittenweem looked blacker than ever, waiting impatiently for Crown counsel to re-examine the witness; but seeing that the Solicitor-General made no move in that direction, cheerfully undertook the task himself. In answer to his questions the following information was elicited.

Haviland had only received one letter that M'George saw, namely, the one that he was reading on the Saturday morning. Then let the witness look at the letter number three of the productions.

"Is that the letter you refer to?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know!" bellowed the exasperated old gentleman, and it certainly did not sound like a "benevolent bellow."

"I am not in the habit of looking over a man's shoulder when he is reading his correspondence," protested M'George with spirit.

To this there was obviously no answer, and the baffled Judge-interrogator waved him away with a despicable grin.

Then followed Mike O'Callaghan, the little newsboy,

who had seen Harry walking past St Asaph's Church in the direction of Queen Anne Square at a quarter to ten o'clock on the Sunday night.

"Ow yes," he said in answer to Robert; "there are hundreds of places he might have been going to—Palace Street, for instance. There were also some disreputable slums not a quarter of a mile away."

"What do you mean by 'disreputable slums'?" queried Pittenweem.

"When ye go there," Mike advised confidentially, "keep a stick or a knife handy," and he was dismissed with the best-tempered nod of the day.

Charles Pennifeather was called next.

"And what do *you* do for a living?" asked the fine old crusted gentleman on the bench after administering the oath, eyeing with intense disfavour the well-fitting clothes and the black-rimmed monocle.

"Nothing, my lord," replied Pennifeather pleasantly.

"Spend your time in frequenting so-called music-rooms and the like?" Pittenweem sneered. He really became more unbearable as the day wore on.

"Such time as I have to spare I do devote to these enjoyments," Pennifeather answered.

"And the time you cannot spare for such practices is spent in idleness, I suppose?"

"Your lordship may suppose so," said the witness without turning a hair, "but it is not the fact."

"Bah!" quoth the old man. "Go on with your witness, Mr Solicitor-General."

"If your lordship pleases," assented the Solicitor, with the air of one to whom it was of no moment whether his lordship pleased or no. "What are you, Mr Pennifeather? What is your profession?"

"I am confidential adviser to certain banks and insurance offices."

"I thought you told me you did nothing!" the Judge burst in explosively.

"Pardon me," Pennifeather replied as before, "your lordship asked me what I did for a living. I answered truthfully 'Nothing.' I do not practise my profession for a living."

"Perhaps," said the Solicitor-General, throwing oil on troubled waters, "we shall proceed more expeditiously if you will kindly attend to *my* questions and answer them."

"I came here prepared to do so," returned the undisturbed witness; and Pittenweem, choking down his impotent spleen, resumed his pen.

Thereafter Pennifeather, encouraged by the neatly-framed apposite interrogation of his interlocutor, proceeded to give a truthful and graphic account of the gatherings in the music-room. He told of the interchanging flashes of wit and repartee between Maria and Haviland. He never saw anything approaching love-making on Haviland's part, or more than friendly regard on the part of Maria. On the other hand, she did not dislike or fear him; quite the reverse. He was not surprised at the announcement of her engagement to Hamish Stuart. Indeed, he had always anticipated it. There was no jealousy of Stuart in anything he saw of Haviland's conduct, nor did Maria show displeasure but the contrary when Haviland congratulated them both heartily.

So far all was going well, and if only the fellow could be trusted to keep that King Charles's head hallucination about Mr Langworthy out of his evidence, it appeared as if nothing unfavourable, either to our cause or his own credibility, was to be got out of him.

"I take you now to the night of 9th June," the Solicitor-General went on. "After the play and the entertainment, which some of us remember," and he smiled with quietly malicious pleasure towards the bench, "what happened?"

"Most of the company drove to the ball in the Assembly Rooms," the witness replied.

"And you?"

"I retired to a dressing-room to change. Afterwards, I looked into the music-room before walking to the club. I intended going on to the ball afterwards."

"Well? What or whom did you see in the music-room?"

"The lights were out; but two fires were burning brightly. In Edinburgh June nights are not always

summer. I saw Haviland sitting on a couch, staring into the fire?"

"Did you speak to him?"

"No. I knew he was worn out after his prodigious exertions of the past fortnight; besides——"

"Yes? Besides?" the Solicitor-General prompted.

"I thought it just possible that he might be brooding over the betrothal of Miss Langworthy to his friend."

"You think that he was fond of her, then?"

"Very!"

"I am willing to admit that, if my learned friend so desires," said Robert.

"There are no admissions admissible in a criminal cause," growled Pittenweem.

"Be it so," said the Solicitor, hurriedly passing on.

Then Pennifeather proceeded to explain how he went to the club, changed into evening clothes, and started for the ball. When lighting a cigarette at one corner of Queen Anne Square, he was surprised to observe Miss Langworthy pass by, moving swiftly in the direction of her house. She must have seen him by the light of the match. Astonished that she should be alone in the street at midnight, he followed ("No, not from curiosity, my lord, but for her protection if need be"). She entered by the side door, and he waited in the shadow till she emerged in about quarter of an hour. She was in the act of drawing a cloak about her shoulders, and hurried off towards the Assembly Rooms. He followed, and went straight into the ball after she had retired to the cloak-room. Walking swiftly through the rooms, he found none of the intimate friends absent except Haviland. Shortly after, Miss Langworthy came into the supper-room with Stuart and spoke to her father. He did not hear what was said. Two hours afterwards he found Haviland walking from the direction of Queen Anne Square to Palace Street, hilarious and rather incoherent. During these two hours Miss Langworthy had been at the ball.

On the Monday morning early, say one-thirty, he received a message that he was wanted at the Palace Street house, that Haviland, who was dying, had sent

for him, but did not, or could not, speak to him personally after his arrival.

"Had you any idea," asked the Solicitor, "why he sent for you?"

"I had," the witness replied.

"What?"

"I suspected that he wanted to tell me something within his knowledge," answered Pennifeather slowly and carefully, "in regard to an inquiry I was then engaged in."

"Humph!" said the Judge, with manifest curiosity.

Of course this line of examination was quite irregular and incompetent, but Robert sat quiet, waiting and watching, while motioning to me not to interfere.

"I thought he was anxious," Pennifeather continued, "to give me a clue which would have pointed to the true perpetrator of this murder; and, had he been able to do so, this trial would never have taken place."

Robert smiled in gratified appreciation; Arthur Marshall pulled contemplatively at his scrubby beard; and the procurator-fiscal once more cowered beneath the lightning glance of his counsel, who had evidently been led to expect a very different answer.

Old Pittenweem sputtered furiously.

"We want facts, sir! We do not desire your opeenions and surmises."

"I answered the question I was asked," the witness replied, quite unmoved; which of course was quite true, but none the less aggravating to the choleric Pittenweem on that account.

Then Pennifeather gave an account of the scene in the music-room, when Hamish, Honoria, and he went there after Haviland's death, the finding of Maria asleep, the condition of the room, the crushed flowers, the overturned and empty flower vases, the champagne glass that was afterwards found to contain dregs of arsenic, the advent of Christine, and Maria's impassioned demand to be taken from the house.

Baffled and rather flurried by the impenetrability of the witness, the Solicitor-General skimmed lightly over this part of the case, doubtless in the hope of being able

to get more out of Hamish and Honoria—a hope, I may say, which was destined to be frustrated.

Robert rose, suave, courteous, and genial as ever.

“You have modestly described yourself as a confidential adviser, Mr Pennifeather,” he began, “but I understand that you have an extensive practice in that regard?”

“I am working at it fifteen hours a day.”

“And I believe that, since your arrival here, large sums dishonestly appropriated, amounting to some seventeen or eighteen thousand pounds, have been recovered for a private individual and a trust estate, through your instrumentality?”

“That is so,” said Pennifeather.

“And are you at present engaged in disentangling a series of attempted frauds?”

“That is the reason for my presence in Edinburgh.”

“Aye? And is that what took ye to the music-room, as you call it?” chuckled the kindly old gentleman on the bench.

“I sow beside all waters,” the witness returned sweetly. “I think that I once had the pleasure of encountering your lordship there!”

“You know the prisoner?” asked Robert.

“I have that honour.”

“And you conseeder it a high honour?” came from the Court in contemptuous accents, self-restraint not being the most conspicuous of his lordship’s judicial qualities.

“I consider that the young lady is suffering vicariously for the crime of another, under the machinations of a scoundrel,” Pennifeather replied, without heat or change of countenance.

Once more rubbing his chin thoughtfully, old Arthur Marshall looked up at the witness with a sly sidelong glance.

“Again I must remind you,” rasped Pittenweem, “that we desire facts, not opeenions.”

“Again I reply,” said Pennifeather unmoved, “that I answer as I am asked.”

Then Robert took him back to the night of the ball.

He had not spoken to Maria on the street at midnight, because he thought that she had seen him and desired to avoid him.

This was bad ; so Robert tacked off.

It certainly did not occur to him, when he saw Haviland sitting on the couch, that he had the expectant look of one waiting for a pleasant interview. Quite the reverse. When Maria was returning to the ball, he saw that she now and then held her ungloved left hand to her lips, as though kissing her ring. He knew that she had taken off her engagement ring when acting, as he himself had pointed out its incongruity with the costume.

This was better ; and Robert, wisely leaving it there, changed the subject.

One of Haviland's dying exclamations was "Save Maria." Also, "It was the woman of my dream." He thought that might mean that the woman of his dream was another than Maria.

"You have been asked about your own opinions and prognostications, Mr Pennifeather," said Robert, "and I think that, in cross, I am entitled to put this question. Did you suspect the identity of the person who had poisoned Mr Haviland?"

"I did."

"Was that your reason for going to Queen Anne Square that night?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because, if my suspicions were correct, the murderers were elsewhere by that time."

"I ask you no more on this subject but one question, for what it is worth. Did you suspect a man or a woman?"

"Both," answered Pennifeather—"a man, the principal of a gang of swindlers, whom I hope shortly to lay by the heels, and a woman, his accomplice."

"I pass from that," said Robert hastily, as he saw the old war-horse on the bench preparing for another onslaught. "One other question on a matter of fact.

How was the prisoner dressed when you found her on the couch?"

"In her night clothes only, without slippers, and not covered by quilt or rug."

"And she appeared asleep."

"She was asleep."

"When she was awakened, did she seem dazed, and surprised to find herself there?"

"Very much so."

"Did she show fear," inquired Robert, "of any one, or anything?"

"She showed modesty, and shocked amazement at Mr Stuart's attitude and language, but no fear of any person."

"Or of anything?"

"She seemed in mortal terror of being left in the house," Pennifeather replied, "so we carried her away."

"And Miss O'Mara remained?"

"Yes."

That was all. Again the Solicitor-General did not seek to re-examine; but once more the Court butted in.

"Why did you go to that particular house at that time in the morning?"

"Mr Stuart was determined to go, and I was afraid to allow him to do so alone."

"Of what were you afraid?"

"Danger to him and Miss Langworthy."

"Not danger *from* Miss Langworthy?" the genial judge insinuated with a leer.

"Most certainly not," returned Pennifeather drily.

"But your fears turned out to be groundless?" his lordship queried.

"I am by no means sure of that," said the witness.

"How did you obtain entrance?" inquired Pittenweem.

Then the fat was in the fire.

Flushing to the temples, the Solicitor-General rose in his place.

"I purposely refrained from asking that question," he

said sternly. "Nor is it in the public interest that it should be answered."

"What? what? what's this?" shouted Pittenweem, with bristles erect. "Is this trial not itself in the public interest? The jury are entitled to full information, and the question is competent. Otherwise it would never have been put by me!"

The Solicitor rose again, as if to protest. Then, shrugging his shoulders, he sat down abruptly.

"You heard the question, witness! Be good enough to answer!" said Pittenweem, whose curiosity, like that of the spectators, was now all agog.

"I obtained entrance," responded Pennifeather, as imperturbably as ever, "by means of a secret door leading from the lane direct into the music-room."

That indescribable buzzing and rustling sigh known as "a sensation in court" immediately passed along the crowded benches. But greater than the surprise of the audience was that of Maria, whose wide-opened eyes and startled exclamation bore witness that she had then heard of this contrivance for the first time.

"What? what? what's this?" crowed the excited old judge gleefully; "a secret door, a concealed entrance to her very chamber! Surely, Mr Solicitor, this is information of the utmost cogency! Hark ye, Mr—er—"

"Pennifeather," murmured the useful Clerk of Court.

"I know—I know," quoth Pittenweem testily. "I beg of you, do not interrupt me! Hark ye, Mr Penny Farthing, how did you know of this means of ingress?"

"My name is Pennifeather," he answered. "I did not know. I deduced it."

"Oh! you deduced it! Deduced it, did ye? From what premises, may I ask, sir?"

"From the inside premises," said the other; and this time a distinct titter went round.

"You are pleased to be facetious, sir," his lordship exclaimed bitterly. "It comes to this, then, that the prisoner was found alone, lying seemingly asleep on a couch in her nightdress in the room which she usually inhabited, access to which was obtainable in a clandestine

tine manner, without those in the house being one whit the wiser."

"It comes to that," Pennifeather agreed.

"And the secret of this concealed contrivance she was, of course, quite aware of, eh?"

"The secret of this contrivance she cannot possibly have known," Pennifeather corrected him, calmly.

"And how can you tell that, sir?" shouted the old man, taken aback.

"Because," said the witness as before, "it is a little invention of my own, applied originally to certain safes and strong rooms, which has now had to be modified and, in some cases, discarded, as in one instance the combination was stolen and carried away bodily."

"And what is to prevent *her*?"—and the gallant old fellow pointed an accusing forefinger contemptuously at the prisoner—"from having been the thief?"

"The simple reason that I know the thief. I know that, for reasons of his own, he had this ready method of entrance to this particular house constructed, and the prisoner is the last person in the world whom the thief would entrust with the secret."

Some one—in the excitement of the moment I did not notice who it was—thrust a scrap of paper in my hand, addressed to the Solicitor-General, which I tossed across the table.

"And what is the thief's name, sir?" bellowed the Court.

"Stop!" cried the Solicitor-General, rising and speaking in his most peremptory tones. "This must cease! I have already said that it is contrary to the public interest that these questions should be asked. As matter of legal procedure, the whole line of inquiry is, I submit, irrelevant and not pertinent to the issue here. But whether that be so or not, questions of such national and international importance are here involved, that if an answer to the last interrogation put by your lordship is persistently demanded, I shall be compelled to take effectual measures, with which your lordship is quite familiar, to prevent its being given."

I had often wondered what would happen if a lion

were really bearded in his den. Now I knew. By a merciful interposition of Providence Pittenweem did not take an apoplectic fit; but he was very near it.

"Well, well," he muttered at length, "the question is perhaps immaterial. Think it over; but it would better have befitted the complacency of the Crown and the dignity of this High Court if I had been warned in time—and in private! The Court will now adjourn."

CHAPTER V.

THE END OF THE FIRST DAY.

THE rest of the day, unfortunately, did not seem to go so well for us. Somewhat subdued by his bout with the masterful counsel for the Crown, and none the happier from the knowledge that he had been entirely in the wrong, Lord Pittenweem settled down into a senile condition of concentrated cold fury. Every official in the place he harried and harassed. The windows that had been opened to admit a breath of fresh air he insisted on having closed at once, and he desired those to be opened that had been hermetically sealed for generations. His pens were bad, and his blotting-paper worse; his spectacles had gone amissing, his chair was uncomfortable, his footstool out of place, and he and his clerk—an old crabstick almost as cross-grained and cantankerous as himself—had a battle royal, *coram publico*, over the vexed question of the inkpot.

“Did I not tell you to fill my inkpot with fresh ink?”

“I know fine that ye did, and I fill’t it.”

“You did not!”

“I did,” answered the clerk positively. “I poured fresh ink out of this bottle into your lordship’s inkstand when ye were taking your lunch.”

“Do you call that fresh ink?”

“Yes.”

“Very well,” said his master, determined to have the last word, “there’s very little of it, at any rate!”

During the afternoon the Solicitor-General went about his work with earnest impartiality and considerable zest;

and a few unlucky and unexpected rebuffs caused Robert's carefully-laid line of defence to totter and stagger once or twice in rather ominous fashion. The unfortunate disclosure about the secret door, too, had not been without its effect upon the jury. One felt that they had grown suspicious and ill at ease. Here was something unusual, unexplained and hushed up, which should have been openly and fully disclosed. Our hope was that this feeling might react upon the Crown case more than it could injure ours. The malign suggestion of Pittenweem was doubtless calculated to throw a slur upon the fair fame of our client, and now all depended upon the subsequent turn of events.

Hamish Stuart and my dear Honoria followed each other into the witness-box after luncheon; and if ever the Recording Angel had need of forgiving tears with which to blot out records of transgressions, if ever the ministering spirit had cause to blush as he handed in his message, it was when these two gallant souls swore that they had found Harry Haviland on the doorstep of the house in Palace Street on the fatal night. Let casuists refine upon the point as they may, the fact remains that our dwindling hopes would have been extinguished like the flame of a wasting taper had the truth been fully disclosed. Fortunately those on the other side were as ignorant as Robert and I, and, mercifully, no unlucky blundering question disturbed the serenity of either witness.

Hamish was pale and ill. By the Solicitor-General, whose sympathy for his unhappy position was manifest, he was treated with marked and gentle courtesy. Even old Pittenweem evinced an unusual desire to relieve the witness from unnecessary pain and embarrassment; but this was not the first time that he had encountered Hamish, and he had learned a wholesome regard for his powers of sarcastic repartee.

Robert left the cross-examination to me.

"We have not spoken," he said sadly, "since his desertion of Maria, and this is no place to begin to interchange courteous amenities."

During the whole of his trying ordeal Hamish kept

his face resolutely averted from Maria, who sat, with pale face and quivering lip, clenching her little hands in her lap and trembling violently, while the goodly matron at her side—Heaven bless her for a motherly, understanding creature!—gently passed an arm behind her shoulders, and soothed her with well-meaning, comforting kindness.

Acting on Robert's advice and instruction, I passed over the scene in the music-room after Harry's death with only one or two questions—the dress of the prisoner—the position of the flower vases and the wine-glass with the dregs of arsenic—the advent of Christine.

Then I asked him if she had ever betrayed terror of the house. Of course Pittenweem grew impatient as usual when he was unable, or declined, to see the drift of questions; but I stuck to my point.

Hamish answered that she had confided to him some vague fears on the very day that they became engaged.

Then I put the crucial question—whether she had said that she walked in her sleep?—and he told the story of her strange dreams.

I could see that this began to interest the jury—it certainly appeared to intrigue Arthur Marshall, who craned forward with bent head to listen—and so I ventured the question whether he had ever had any suspicion that she was under the influence of a drug?—a double-edged weapon this!

“Never!” answered Hamish, with great firmness. “Never the slightest suspicion! She was the happiest, most straightforward, blithest and most truthful of God's creatures, as I believed”—here he faltered, and then added, as before, “as I believed, and still believe!”

Maria's tears fell fast as she clasped the friendly arm of the matron.

“And after all that you have sworn to, sir,” thundered the Court; “after all that you have learned and seen with your own eyes, do you still desire to marry this happy, straightforward, and truthful creature?”

The attack was so unprovoked and cruel, that for the moment I literally trembled with rage. Anything

might have happened, and I for one felt that I did not care what, or how soon; but Robert laid a calm restraining hand upon my gown, as he gazed pitifully and earnestly straight at the witness, hanging on his reply, while Maria covered her face with her hands. The Solicitor-General, with a disdainful gesture, turned his back upon the Court, and old Arthur Marshall ceased for an instant twisting his scrubby beard.

But Hamish neither winced nor blanched.

"Your lordship may consider it your duty to put to me that question," he said calmly, "but I must respectfully but finally decline to answer it."

"One moment, Mr Stuart!" said the Solicitor-General, rising. "I am reminded of an omission," and he showed him the fatal letters.

"In whose handwriting are these?"

Hamish looked at them, one after the other, slowly.

"They appear to me to be written by Miss Maria Langworthy," he answered at last.

"All of them?"

"I think so."

This was new matter, on which I was entitled to cross-examine; so I handed to him first the signature "Christopher Langworthy" done by Maria, and asked whether he thought that to be in her writing.

"Not in the least like it!"

Next, the letter transcribed by Arthur Marshall was put to him, and he was emphatically of opinion that it was in the same hand as all the others.

"What is the relevancy of this?" inquired the Judge, to which I replied that I had produced these two specimens, and would prove them in due course, and the judicial curiosity remained for the time unsatisfied. After that Hamish left the box, and, having obtained permission, withdrew altogether from the Court for the day.

The experts on handwriting came next—a pretentious crew. So long as they were towed in mid-stream by the advocate-depute, the ramping Golightly—with many whoops and holloas as if he were the driving bargee—

they retained their self-important serenity; but the Langworthy signature and the Arthur Marshall letter brought them to irretrievable shipwreck.

"If you will let us know," Lord Pittenweem complained, "the purpose of these productions, the witness will understand the drift of your questions."

"With all deference," Robert answered politely, "I must decline to give this expert gentleman an inkling of what I desire him to say or deny. Look at the Langworthy signature," he continued. "In your opinion, could the hand that penned that have produced the three letters?"

"Certainly not!" returned the witness, almost pittingly.

"Then it naturally follows, I suppose, that the hand that wrote the letters could not have done the signature?"

The witness flourished a magnifying-glass with expository impressiveness.

"Neither of these specimens," he observed oracularly, "the letters and the signature, bears the impress of being disguised. They are both natural hands, and written by different persons."

"Very good!" said Robert. "Now look at the letter I produce"—(the Arthur Marshall letter)—"Is that in the same handwriting as the other three letters?"

But, being entirely ignorant of what he was expected to say, the witness hummed and hawed, and pished and pshawed, and held the document up to the light, and upside down, and edgeways, and sideways, near his nose, and then at arm's-length; examined it with a magnifying-glass, and peered at it through a lens, and still remained crestfallen and dumb.

"Would you care to call for any other form of ophthalmic instrument?" asked Robert sarcastically.

The witness scratched his head, rubbed his nose, and smiled ingratiatingly.

"It comes to this, I suppose," quoth Robert icily and incisively, "that you don't know?"

"Until I am informed whether this last letter is produced as genuine, or as a forgery," the witness answered at length, with a ludicrous endeavour to

recover his dignity, "I can give no opinion on the matter!"

"I see," said Robert. "If I tell you, then you will be able to tell me! Thank you!"

And he sat down.

This was all pretty fooling, but the dread and deadly earnest of the tragedy still overshadowed us.

The medical evidence as to the cause of poor Harry's death was on a very different plane from the testimony of the cocksure lithographers. The deadly precision and acute-minded deductions of the toxicologists, Sir Stephen Forteath and Dr Overbury—these hardened and accustomed harbingers of doom to many a secret malefactor—rendered them always formidable antagonists for a counsel to tackle, however carefully he might have been coached. Robert laboured long and earnestly, but the only facts of importance that he succeeded in eliciting were that Haviland had been a young man of singular muscular strength, all the organs healthy, that the arsenic found in the stomach could not have been the cause of death, but only such as had been absorbed in the tissues, of which no trace had been discovered; further, that death had been due to asphyxiation, that there was the mark of a hypodermic needle on the left wrist, but no appearance of any known drug found at the autopsy, while the symptoms, when the patient was in life, pointed to the absorption of some form of deliriant intoxicant. A similar mark, or traces, had been found on the wrist of the prisoner, but she had been carefully watched since her incarceration, and betrayed no symptoms indicating that she was addicted to the use of opium, cocaine, or other drug.

And there he had to leave it.

Then it was proved that the prisoner had frequently purchased arsenic, and that traces had been found, not only in the overturned flower-glasses, but also in a champagne glass which had been cast on the floor near the window.

"That," said the Solicitor-General, "concludes my case, with the exception of two witnesses who, in the circumstances, were excused from attendance to-day—Mr

Christopher Langworthy and Miss Christine O'Mara. I now propose," he added, "that the prisoner's declaration and the incriminating letters be read to the jury."

For the first time that day Maria looked around in wild confusion, like a trapped bird.

"Stop your ears with your hands, dearie," the matron whispered, casting an indignant glance at the Clerk of Court, who was reading on steadily and monotonously, while the gaping crowd leant forward, greedily devouring every syllable.

And, so sitting, Maria remained until the last echo of the droning voice died away.

"To-morrow morning at ten," said the Judge, stretching himself wearily; "and in the meantime, gentlemen, until you have heard all that is to be said on both sides, I charge you, as fair-minded and impartial men, to refrain from discussing together the evidence that has already been given."

And, with the language of these dreadful letters fresh in their minds, and still ringing in their ears, the jury were driven away to their lodging for the night.

We saw her for a few minutes in the cell below the court-room, where we remained standing for a little together in constrained silence.

"He is rather a cross old gentleman, Lord Pittenweem," Maria ventured at last wistfully. "I wonder why he takes pleasure in thinking such wicked thoughts of me!"

"Kind thoughts are for kind persons!" I said roughly—for I was still very sore over the whole proceedings of the day.

Robert only smiled his kind indulgent smile as he answered cheerfully—

"He cannot harm you, my dear. Thank Heaven for a jury of honest men!"

"Who was the strange shabby man who spoke to you once or twice, Robert?" she asked. "I seem to remember him somehow."

"A clerk of Mr Poole's," replied Robert absently, "but a wonderful one!"

Then, after thinking for some time, he added solemnly—

“Maria, by this time to-morrow it may be too late! Is there nothing—nothing that you wish to say to me? No instruction, no hint to give?”

“Oh, Robert!” she cried, with dilated eyes, “is it not going well? Do you think I am—to die?”

“It is necessary to be very plain with you now,” he said gravely. “We may succeed, I think we shall succeed, going on as we are; but if you know, as you have confessed you do, some fact that will absolutely exonerate you and show you blameless, I implore you to reveal it. It is your solemn duty, ere it be too late.”

She shook her head sadly, and her tears fell fast.

“I have nothing to reveal,” she murmured, “nothing—nothing!”

Then, catching sight of Robert’s stricken face, she threw her arms around his neck.

“If it were my own secret,” she cried, “how gladly would I tell. But I have promised, honourably——”

“And will you sacrifice yourself for some unworthy person, even if a relative or friend?” he inquired meaningly.

“A friend! a relative!” she exclaimed, starting back. “No! no! You don’t understand! I have given my word, and should never be pardoned in this world, or the next, were I to break it!”

Robert sighed deeply, gazing long into her truthful eyes.

“You are a noble woman, dear!” he said at length, “and to-morrow, please God, you shall be once more your sweet self, free from sorrow and care!”

“Nevermore free from sorrow and care!” she sobbed bitterly, “never—never more!”

Slowly we withdrew, after they had taken her away, Robert, calm, stately, and self-subdued as usual,—and I, cursing Hamish Stuart solemnly, sincerely, and emphatically in my heart of hearts.

CHAPTER VI.

MR PENNIFEATHER MAKES A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

MARIA had been conveyed to her melancholy lodging in the Calton Jail; and Lord Pittenweem, swathed like a mummy, had departed for his scarcely less dreary dwelling at Lands Loan, in a hearse-like carriage driven by his decrepit coachman, who sat, as usual, leaning well forward on the box. It was popularly believed that this position was habitually assumed by the old jehu on account of his firm belief that some day the ramshackle conveyance would break in halves, and he preferred to take his chance with the horses rather than remain behind to listen to the lurid objurgations of his irate master. Ardbuckle and Golightly had parted company at the door of the court-house, not on the friendliest footing; and Robert and I, after saying good-bye for the day to Mr Poole, walked down the Mound together, and having made a pretence of dining at the club, betook ourselves once more to the house in Palace Street.

"Where is Stuart?" I inquired.

"Hamish is not living here at present," said Robert, "but I have word from Honoria——"

"From Honoria?" I exclaimed, rather alarmed at the conjunction of names.

"Yes! Whatever happens, she is to see Maria to-morrow night, to be charged with a message for Hamish."

"What does it mean?" I asked,

"Don't ask me!" replied Robert. "Perhaps that poor lonely child may be able to communicate to a woman like Honoria some secret which she could not tell to great rough fellows like you and me."

He emptied his blue bag of papers on the desk and sat for a time, head in hand, and very thoughtful. Then came a ring at the door bell.

"Ah!" he said, looking up, "There is Marshall! We lost sight of him when the Court rose."

But it was not Marshall; nor did we see the strange old fellow till the following morning. It was Pennifeather, and a very exultant and elated Pennifeather, too!

"I have done it!" he cried, as he rushed in, waving a letter in the air; "I have pulled it off! The key to the mystery is in my hands at last!"

Robert regarded him silently and sternly, evidently not best pleased, and more than dubious.

"My dear Pennifeather!" he said, "please—please do not come here to distract and unnerve me now, at the eleventh hour! What do you mean?"

"I mean," shouted Pennifeather, his habitual self-restraint thrown to the winds, "that I was right and you were wrong! He is James!—James Langworthy after all!"

"What?" we both exclaimed in a breath.

"I was sure of my man. I knew what he had done, and why he had done it. He shut himself up, refusing to see any one. Even his precognition for the Crown was despatched in writing, I believe. Christine, too, is invisible, poor woman, distracted by grief and her usual neuralgia. The servants never see them, or Parker either. All their meals are left at the drawing-room door."

"How do you know all this?" I inquired.

"Mike!" he answered laconically. "But Parker is not always in attendance now. Mike saw him in the lane the night before last, wearing a white muffler and seedy cap; and the respectable Parker was drunk!"

"Well? Go on!" said Robert.

"Two days ago I took the liberty of sending the man Langworthy a certain communication—delivered it myself in the letter-box in the lane."

"A dangerous game," said Robert: "what did you say?"

"Told him I had the screwdriver he threw out of the train window—a long shot, but it hit the mark! Accused him of the death of Haviland, who witnessed the deed, and of his plot against Maria. Gave him a chance for his life, to own up and bolt. Of course he would escape me, but Maria would be saved."

"And what reply did you receive?"

"This," he exclaimed, again flourishing the letter. "Listen!" and he read aloud:

"Clever! clever! and did he think he had me cornered? Not yet, Mr Pennifeather, not yet! Haviland being done for, Maria may now escape, so far as I am concerned. My nest is feathered. Like Earnest Willis and Herbert Grayson, I am gone. Christine you will find in the house. Go there to-night. You know how (proud inventor!) But it is death to go before nine o'clock. Then you may take all Edinburgh with you if you please. *Au revoir!*—Allen Merelli James Aylesbury Langworthy."

"Great God!" exclaimed Robert, roused at last, "this looks like either business or madness. Go there now, at once, Pennifeather! Take Arthur Marshall with you—where can that old rascal be?—and——"

"I am taking the police," answered Pennifeather significantly, "and a brace of automatic pistols as well! Now, I'm off! Shall see you and report later on."

He did see us later on, at ten o'clock that same night, and a very much astonished, chagrined, and stricken Pennifeather he was by that time. We listened with shocked faces to all that he had to say.

Still Arthur Marshall had not returned.

"This," said Robert, "makes confusion worse confounded; but I do not know that the Crown case must certainly break down. I shall see the Solicitor-General at nine o'clock to-morrow morning; and, if he will not move, I shall call the remaining Crown witnesses myself, and you too, Pennifeather, if that old ruffian will permit."

There was an air of perplexity and subdued excite-

ment about the Crown counsel when they took their accustomed places in Court next morning. The poor little prisoner looked pale and wan, but smiled as trustfully as ever when Robert pressed the dear hand and whispered words of comfort and cheer. Old Pittenweem hobbled in, supported appropriately on two sticks, and took his seat, in no better temper because he had dismissed his butler overnight, on account of one cherry out of a pound of the fruit that he had counted beforehand being missing at dinner-time.

"Your next witness, Mr Solicitor?" he inquired gruffly.

"I call no more evidence," that gentleman replied.

"Not Mr Langworthy or Miss O'Mara?" his lordship ejaculated, in amazement.

"I call neither of these persons."

Pittenweem sat back and gasped. Were the heavens falling? Was the *cause célèbre* to fizzle out with his masterly summing up undelivered? He listened in silent anguish as Robert insinuated a question quietly across the table.

"Then, I presume, you withdraw the charge?"

"No," responded the Solicitor, almost brusquely, and Pittenweem emitted a snort of relief. "I close my case now, and do not call either Mr Langworthy or Miss O'Mara."

"Then I do!" cried Robert, in ringing tones. "My first witness, my lord, is Christopher Langworthy."

Pittenweem almost fell on his neck. This charming, inexperienced young counsel had fallen into the toils! The evidence necessary to complete the case for the Crown was to be forthcoming after all!

"Certainly, sir!" he condescended graciously. "Verra right and proper! Macer, call Christopher Langworthy!"

But no Christopher Langworthy responded.

Arthur Marshall, it is true, went zealously forth to lend his aid in the search, but Christopher Langworthy, though called upon, was evidently not at home to callers.

Standing on his chair, the Solicitor-General leaned across to whisper something in the Judge's ear.

"Oho!" exclaimed the gratified old gentleman, nodding in a knowing manner.

"Mr—er—Montgomery," he resumed, almost persuasively, "I do not find Mr Langworthy's name in your list of witnesses."

Robert looked positively aghast, as well he might.

"But, my lord," he protested, "he is on the Crown list!"

"It is usual," the old man dogmatised, "for a prisoner to include in his own list all the witnesses he intends to call."

For once Robert was thoroughly roused.

"I claim my inalienable right," he cried, with flashing eyes, "unquestionable and hitherto unquestioned, to insist that every single Crown witness who has not already been examined shall be in attendance, that I may call him as a witness for the defence if I so determinè!"

Pittenweem's face resumed its usual uninviting aspect, and he bit his lip.

"How say you, Mr Solicitor?" he demanded surlily.

"I agree with my learned friend's view of the law and practice," that gentleman snapped.

So once more the missing witness was requested to come forward; but although the macers, with the willing assistance of Arthur Marshall, searched long and diligently, he was not to be found.

"Then," said Robert, "I call Christine O'Mara."

By this time the curiosity of all—spectators and jurors alike—was raised to fever pitch.

"It is useless," the Solicitor-General at length admitted, "and it is well that I should announce publicly, from information received both from the police and my learned friend, that these two witnesses have disappeared since yesterday, been spirited away, or vanished, under circumstances which will certainly call for close investigation."

Arthur Marshall clapped his hand to his mouth, and gently nudged me in the back as a sign of his enjoyment of the situation. It made me rather uncomfortable, for I could not dismiss from my mind his versatile

expediency, his clever forgery, and his unscrupulous suggestion as to the use of it. Almost in spite of myself, the thought was borne in upon me that he might have something to do with the absconding of the inhabitants of the house.

"In these circumstances," said Robert, rising again, "I desire to recall the witness Mr Pennifeather."

But here Pittenweem was adamant. To recall on behalf of a prisoner one who had already been examined for the Crown was contrary to all precedent, and incompetent.

"Except of consent, my lord!" Robert suggested, with deference.

"Consent?"

"It has been arranged between my learned friend and myself," said the Solicitor-General, "that this course should be pursued. Otherwise I should have exercised my *right*"—with great emphasis—"to recall the witness myself. Consequently, I need hardly say that I consent."

With the worst possible grace the old judge gave in.

"Have it your own way then!" was all he said.

So Pennifeather returned to the witness-box, amidst a silence that could be felt.

"Mr Pennifeather," said Robert, "I believe that yesterday you received a written communication?"

"I did."

"My learned friend and I," Robert continued, "are agreed as to the incompetency of producing that document, seeing that it has not been lodged timeously——"

"I am glad to hear that you are agreed that *something* is incompetent!" his lordship growled.

"I shall therefore only ask," said Robert, proceeding as though he heard him not, "what you did in consequence."

"Along with two policemen," Pennifeather replied, "all of us being armed, I went, at nine o'clock in the evening, to the lane at the side of Mr Langworthy's house in Queen Anne Square. By means of the secret door we entered the music-room, which we found in great disorder, large quantities of paper having evi-

dently been destroyed in both fireplaces. I endeavoured to manipulate the lift leading to the first and second floors, but could not move the panel. Accordingly we ascended by the stair. Cries proceeded from the second floor, and when we rushed upstairs and unbarred a heavy door leading to the servants' quarters, we found there the domestics, all of whom had been imprisoned since the previous night. The rooms on the drawing-room floor were empty. Mr Langworthy's couch, chair, and crutches were in the large front room. The apartment usually occupied by Miss Langworthy was in perfect order. In Miss O'Mara's room we found a panel slid back and an open lift, which led to a room furnished as a bedroom, behind the music-room, of whose existence the servants had been unaware. From this chamber there was a concealed exit to the back green, similar to that in the lane. Signs of hasty flight were everywhere; but, according to the servants, none of Miss O'Mara's clothes were missing, nor any of Mr Langworthy's."

"Except the clothes they must have been wearing, I suppose?" Robert suggested.

"That," answered Pennifeather, "is part of the mystery. As to Mr Langworthy's wardrobe, I could get no definite information; but, on the authority of Miss O'Mara's maid, I understand that all the dresses she possessed are left behind."

"Then she's been thrown on a cold world with a vengeance!" chuckled Pittenweem. "How had they got away, these three? and who had carried the invalid gentleman?"

"They must have gone by the newly-discovered exit to the back green," said Pennifeather. "For reasons of my own, I have had the house watched closely night and day."

"Humph!" snorted the Judge, regarding the witness keenly, and with considerably more respect than he had previously vouchsafed him.

"I think, however," Robert prompted, "that you have a still more important discovery to disclose?"

"By dint of great exertion," Pennifeather responded,

"I succeeded in opening the panel in the music-room. We were horrified to find inside the dead body of a man."

"Good God!" cried Arthur Marshall hoarsely, half rising; but, as Pennifeather looked round, the old man shrank back, and covered his face with his hands.

"Go on!" said Robert.

"On the left wrist of this man was a puncture, and, firmly clasped in his right hand, he held a hypodermic syringe."

"Proceed, sir!" cried Pittenweem fractiously.

"The man appeared to have reddish hair and an auburn beard. I thought that it was——"

"Not my father! No, no! Say it was not father!" the prisoner shrieked, holding out imploring hands.

"I thought it was Mr Langworthy," the witness went on quickly, glancing with pity at the poor distracted girl, "but, on looking closely, we found that he was a man in disguise. I removed the wig and beard, and discovered that he was no other than——"

"Whom?" exclaimed Arthur Marshall, *sotto voce*, but with great eagerness.

"Mr Langworthy's body servant, Saul Parker."

Marshall sat back, with a groan.

"The body was searched," pursued Pennifeather, "but no drug of any kind was found, nor phial. The syringe itself was empty. There was nothing whatever in any pocket but an unmarked handkerchief, some loose change, and this open cheque"—here he held up a slip of paper—"which I am told I may not produce; but it is written and signed by Christopher Langworthy, payable to himself or bearer, for the sum of one hundred thousand pounds!"

I think it has been already hinted that, if Mr Pennifeather can be said to have had one weakness, it was a certain delight in a dramatic situation; and he succeeded then. It was neither a gasp nor a sigh—it was a positive roar of incredulous amazement that greeted this bizarre and unheard-of conclusion! Men and women stared at each other, as though to gain confirmation that they had heard aright. Old Arthur

Marshall passed his hand two or three times over his bowed head, and as for Mr Poole, he positively goggled and gaped at the witness in a silent stupor.

Then the Solicitor-General rose.

"I do not know, in the meantime," he said, "the bearing of this incident on the question that we are here trying, but in the public interest, as well as in the interest of justice in this case, I must require an answer to this question. What do you deduce from all that you have told?"

This time Pittenweem did not protest, and how fervently did we desire that he should do so!

"I firmly believe——" Pennifeather began.

"Now it's coming!" muttered Robert.

"I firmly believe that the man who posed as Christopher Langworthy is not that gentleman at all, but his twin-brother James."

"No, no!" cried the prisoner again, in deep distress. "He is, he is my father, my own dear father!"

"Silence!" roared Pittenweem roughly; while old Marshall shook his head, as if impatient of the interruption.

"He had reason to fear me," Pennifeather proceeded, "and has made his escape, carrying his unfortunate relative with him. The servant he may have first bribed to hold his tongue—bribed him with his brother's money, of course—and then probably made away with him!"

"Leaving the cheque as evidence of the deed?" the Solicitor suggested slyly.

"Ah! I agree," quoth Pennifeather, "that is a difficulty, and on that point I merely hazard a surmise."

"Oh! you are wrong—wrong—altogether wrong!" Maria murmured distractedly.

I turned to say a soothing word to her as Robert once more addressed the Court.

"I need hardly say, my lord, that, on this side of the bar, we do not adopt that theory, or put it forward. We know the unfortunate Mr Langworthy personally, and, whoever may be responsible for the dark deed done in that house, we are convinced that he is not the man."

Maria smiled gratefully to her counsel, and Arthur Marshall once more nodded approval.

"You may stand down, sir!" said Pittenweem to the witness. "Now, Mr Solicitor, what course do you propose to pursue?"

"We have considered anxiously and carefully," replied the Crown counsel, "and have come to the conclusion that the ends of justice can best be satisfied by allowing this case to take its normal course."

"What do you say," suggested the old wheedler to Robert, "to stopping now, and allowing me to take the verdict of the jury on the case as it stands?"

"If my learned friend withdraws the charge unreservedly, of course I shall be too happy," Robert answered, with a bow.

"I cannot do that, consistently with my public duty," said the Solicitor-General.

"But what do you say to my proposal," Pittenweem persisted, "even although the charge be not withdrawn?"

I confess that it took a moment or two before the full enormity of this insidious suggestion dawned on me; but Robert's eye flashed fire as he replied on the instant with cutting emphasis—

"I know of only one precedent where such a course was suggested from the bench."

"Aye? and what was that?" inquired Pittenweem, in obvious forgetfulness of the staggering rejoinder to which he laid himself open.

"It occurred," said Robert, "in the case of Deacon Brodie, the notorious Edinburgh housebreaker, who, along with another, was tried before your lordship's illustrious predecessor, Lord Justice-Clerk Braxfield. His lordship made a suggestion similar to that which has just been made, and I need hardly remind your lordship of the historical reply of one of the counsel, the celebrated John Clerk of Eldin."¹

Seldom indeed has any judicial personage merited a rebuke delivered with such withering contempt, and yet

¹ The reply was—"Hang my client, if ye daur, my lord, without first hearing me in his defence!"

in manner so allusive as to offer no target for reprisal. All remained silent, except the effusive Golightly, who burst into a huge guffaw of appreciative laughter; but, from his lordship's portentous frown of black and malevolent wrath, it was pretty obvious that he did remember the historical reply very well, and that he would also remember Robert's bold vindication of his right before the trial was finished.

"You are not yet John Clerk of Eldin, whatever you may conseeder yourself," was the only retort he could think of.

And so the case went on.

We opened with a cloud of witnesses, of every rank and class, to speak to the sweet and childlike innocence and grace of our dear client—the nurse who tended her, the playmates of her girlhood, the schoolmistress who had travelled hundreds of miles to befriend her in this her hour of peril, the friends and companions of recent years, the poor, the halt, and the blind, who blessed her for her unfailing sympathy and charity, the infirm, the hopeless, and the wretched who owed to her never-failing goodness any little comfort they had in life.

Pittenweem did not like it; but he got it,—full, pressed down, and brimming over.

Then Mr Poole proved the writing of the signature, and Robert's clerk identified old Marshall's innocent forgery; and we closed our case.

The Solicitor-General asked for a verdict from the jury—he actually demanded a verdict of guilty! Fluent, epigrammatic, and plausible as ever, he seemed nevertheless rather half-hearted, and it is only fair to say that he made his points for the prosecution simply and without elaboration or embroidery. I am betraying no secret now, when I say that he was riding for a fall. True it is that he might have made the matter sure by simply moving, as we call it, to "*desert the diet simpliciter*"; but his feeling was that Maria was entitled to have her character effectually and completely vindicated by the full and free acquittal of a verdict of not guilty, which, with us, is equivalent to an affirmation of entire innocence. On the other hand, he also knew that he

had a case which it was his duty, as public prosecutor, to place before a jury, relying upon the Judge—with what warrant we shall see presently—to direct the tribunal, and guide the feet of the unaccustomed jurymen on the straight path of fairness and justice.

He finished his temperate and judicious observations in little more than half an hour; and then Robert rose to deliver the great and memorable oration which will always be associated with his name, so long as the memory of his name endures.

CHAPTER VII.

MR PROUDLY'S IMPRESSIONS OF THE ORATION OF
ROBERT MONTGOMERY.

A SCOTTISH jury is a composite body of fifteen good men and true, ten of them "common," and five "special." The mystic significance of this social distinction I do not profess to understand; but the popular belief, even amongst their own countrymen, is that, once you get these fifteen into a jury-box, you are provided with a body of men, all of whom, special and common alike, are typical representatives of that pragmatistical, hard-headed common-sense which is said to be the distinguishing characteristic of the average Scotsman. Like many other popular beliefs, the notion is entirely misleading, the real danger of such a tribunal being that its members are far too apt to be swayed by sentiment and emotion, an impeachment which each of them would indignantly repudiate in his own soul, and die rather than admit to any one else. No impartial and experienced observer, however, can doubt the fact.

I would that I were able, however faintly, to convey some sense of the effect produced on the jury and the other entranced listeners by the speech of Robert Montgomery, with its cogent, close, and acute reasoning, and its powerful, impassioned, but restrained eloquence. To this day it is not, it cannot be forgotten; and to all, as to me, it was a revelation of reserved power and forceful, persuasive, clear-thinking argument, never excelled in the region of forensic oratory.

Standing erect, a tall and commanding figure, his left hand resting on the rail in front of his fair client as

though it were a shield to guard her from harm, Robert began, in easy conversational language, by thanking the Solicitor-General for his conspicuous fairness and moderation. To the whole of his learned friend's premises he assented, but parted company with him as he approached his conclusion. "Only one verdict, gentlemen," he said, "only one verdict can logically follow the evidence you have heard; and, if you will give me your whole attention—(as, in this solemn moment, who would fail?)—I shall show you that the edifice carefully and painfully built up by the public prosecutor, brick by brick and stone by stone, is only reared upon a foundation of sand, ready to crumble into dust before the first fair wind of intelligent criticism, healthful common-sense, and moral appreciation."

Here the speaker paused for a moment; and then, glancing with deep compassion at the fair young creature gazing at him with earnest eyes, and drinking in all that he uttered, he proceeded, in low vibrating tones—

"The duty which I have undertaken—oh! so gladly, but with such deep self-distrust!—requires above all, as those who know will tell you, a quiet and detached self-possession, a capability for unbiassed observation and acute deduction, hampered by no personal or sentimental considerations of interest or friendship. In what case am I then?"—and here his voice grew resonant and powerful, as he faced the jury with unflinching courage—"I, who love the woman who is now a prisoner at the bar, who have always loved her, with a faithful, brotherly devotion and affection—never more brotherly, never more faithful than in this awful hour! My senses fail me, my brain reels, my mind grows numb and powerless at the thought that, through the very love I bear her, failure, however slight, to present her case as you should have it put before you, may help to bring about irreparable disaster!—disaster which I would give my life—God knows how cheerfully and willingly!—to avert! And as I love her, so did she love Harry Haviland, with a pure, exalted, sisterly affection. Who can doubt it who has heard the story told by all their friends and companions? In the days of their happy childhood they

learned and played together, and, as years went by, the bonds strengthened into ties of innocent friendship and intercourse. To-day I mourn as she mourns, our dear dead friend, the bright spirit, the brilliantly gifted youth who wound the tendrils of his fascinating personality around our very heart-strings—

‘I weep the comrade of my choice,—
An awful thought! a life removed,
The human-hearted man I loved,
A spirit, not a breathing voice!’

He is dead. But from the grave his voice even now is sounding in our ears, clear as the clarion call of a silver trumpet! I listen to its echoes, and assume the burden that he laid upon me: ‘Save her! defend her!’ were the words of his dying breath. Obedient to that anguished exhortation I stand before you now. Mine be the glory of defending her! To you there falls the thankful and gracious duty to vindicate and save!”

Words fail me to describe the thrilling effect of this unusual and striking exordium, delivered with all the passionate fervour of intense conviction and the dramatic power of the born and well-graced orator. The Solicitor-General, his face alight with generous and genuine admiration, waited, with bowed head and white clenched hands, for what was to come. Lord Pittenweem sat back in his deep arm chair, solemn, introspective, and silent at last! What pictures of his own lost youth were emerging from the dim and distant past, and crowding upon the memory of that quaint, huddled-up old figure? Even our emotionless factotum Arthur Marshall shaded his face with his hand, as great slow tears forced their way between his trembling fingers.

And then, in a few graphic touches, Robert sketched the happy, care-free, charitable, sympathetic life of Maria.

“And this is the girl,” he exclaimed, in tones of ringing irony; “for, though you see a suffering woman before you, but yesterday she was an artless child—this is the girl, always the gayest of the gay, the darling of

the hearts of her companions, the pitiful and sympathetic friend of the needy, the tender, loving, and solicitous daughter of a helpless father, the betrothed bride of a man of honour and integrity, who, in the very moment of her joyful surrender of her pure young virgin heart, is represented by my learned friend as suddenly developing—for no earthly reason that any sane man can suggest—the savage, unrestrained, tigerish, and ferocious passion which impelled her to destroy the very being whom the Solicitor-General would have you believe she secretly and passionately adored.”

Then Robert began, amid silence deep and impressive, to adumbrate his first line of defence.

“My learned friend perils his case upon the much-talked-of letters, three in all, with two relative envelopes. And indeed he must, for, unless these are all genuine, written by my client and received by Haviland in the knowledge that they came from her, his case tumbles to the ground like a child’s pack of cards. That, as a fair-minded man, my learned friend will admit.”

The Solicitor-General bowed assent.

“With the exception of the first letter and envelope and the second envelope I utterly deny their authenticity; and shall show you, e’er I have done, that they are not, and cannot be, the production of my client.

“But, to begin with, I accept the challenge. I shall assume—if Heaven will pardon an assumption so scandalous and so baseless!—I say, I shall assume that this gently-nurtured, guileless child, scarcely nineteen years old, is in reality their author. If that is the case, the lady before you must not only be the most wickedly abandoned of her sex—a being such as poet the most decadent never dreamed of creating in the realms of fiction,—but she must also be the most cunning, scheming, secretly clever, deceitful, and calculating of depraved and vindictive human beings!

“How would such a one behave? She might prepare the snare and entice her victim to the toils, it is true; but, mark this! she would be sufficiently astute

to obliterate at once and for ever all evidence of her crime. She might pour the deadly poison, but would she not rinse the cup and wash away the dregs? Would she leave on the person of her victim the dread and damning evidence of her identity? Would she not have searched for and destroyed every scrap of writing that bore the impress of her hand? If you can bring yourselves to believe that this fragile creature could force upon a great, strong, athletic young man the vast quantity of poison that undoubtedly he swallowed somehow, is it conceivable that a woman with sufficient boldness and nerve to perpetrate a deed so dreadful, would be so careless of her own safety as to lie down and sleep, calmly and peacefully, in the very scene of the dastardly and diabolic tragedy?"

In this strain he continued for some time, driving the point home with forceful reiteration.

"But, gentlemen," he continued, "and still on the assumption that the letters are genuine, there exists a hiatus in the case for the Crown, a link wanting in the chain, which no specious speculation, no presumption of fact or law, can supply. Granted that Haviland left North Berwick on that fatal Sunday, in consequence of the last alluring invitation, and given that he arrived in Edinburgh, as he did, at six o'clock in the evening, where is the evidence that he was ever in the house in Queen Anne Square at all, between that hour and the moment that he was found, in a dying condition, on the doorstep of the house in Palace Street very early next morning?"

Well might Hamish Stuart and my dear Honoria glance meaningly at each other, and heave great sighs of relief! Well might Mr Pennifeather, who at least suspected the truth, gaze straight before him with expressionless impenetrability! Pittenweem shuffled his papers uneasily as he pored over his note-book, and the advocate-depute leaned forward to make some protest to his leader, who, to his credit be it said, paid not the slightest attention.

"You may tell me," the speaker went on triumphantly, "that, when a man starts on a journey with

an invitation in his pocket, the natural and rational inference is that he keeps the engagement which he has set out to fulfil. True enough! But it is not the *only* rational inference; and his lordship will tell you—I doubt not—as matter of law, and I submit it to you as matter of common-sense, that, unless the only inference you are able to draw is that Haviland actually obeyed the invitation, you are bound to accept any other reasonable explanation, and therefore to acquit the prisoner. How can we know for certain his motives for his sudden journey? He had steadfastly refused to enter that house in answer to the first two requests; why should his will weaken and his purpose change because of the third? It is not for me to speculate, but I place before you two other reasonable alternatives. Either he intended to seek counsel and advice from some close friend, such as Mr Stuart or my humble self, or he knew the writer of the last letters to be a very different person from their ostensible author, and he went to meet him, or her, at the appointed spot. He was seen at quarter to ten on his way to Queen Anne Square by the boy Mike O'Callaghan. But why on his way to Queen Anne Square? He might just as well have been on his way to Palace Street, or to some fatal den, where he had been entrapped, perhaps, on an earlier occasion."

Then he went on to refer at length to the night of the ball, and Haviland's unwillingness to reveal the place from which he had arrived in such a deplorable condition in the small hours of the morning. This being rather delicate ground, however, Robert walked warily and with consummate skill, finishing by dwelling once more with great earnestness and force upon the argument that it was for the Crown to show conclusively not only that Haviland had been invited to Queen Anne Square, but that he had actually gone there in response to the invitation.

By this time, I confess, I had begun to breathe more freely. The jury took the point, that was obvious, and even Pittenweem's face betokened a certain amount of unwilling approval. Such are the pitfalls that beset

the investigators of circumstantial evidence! Here, undoubtedly, was a formidable objection, almost at the threshold, to the entire theory of the prosecution—a discrepancy which could have been cleared up, had Crown counsel but known it, by a couple of apposite questions to Honoria or Hamish.

Leaving this aspect of the case, and turning to the reverse side of the shield, Robert braced himself for a supreme effort to show that the incriminating letters were not proved to have been written by Maria. The first, written in presence of her affianced husband, and actually read over to him, contained, as he urged, nothing but the playful remonstrances of an affectionate friend. The insidious gloze and sinister suggestion made by the procurator-fiscal to the distressed and shocked young woman, when she stood alone, unfriended, helpless, and bewildered, he repudiated with scorn. Then there peeped out the scarcely veiled difficulty with which he had to contend.

"How the forged second letter," he said, "found its way into the envelope—if, indeed, it be the original envelope—I can only conjecture; but it was by a piece of ingenuity that was simply devilish; and, as I shall show you, in that forbidden house devilish agencies were at work."

Here Arthur Marshall, who had been listening with strained attention, murmured an approving assent.

Touching lightly on the possible theory that Haviland, in his overwrought condition, might have written the letters himself, Robert dwelt upon the significance of the fact that the note-book in which Harry had been writing on the Saturday night—"which, for all that we can tell, may have contained the embryo drafts of these hallucinations of a distempered brain"—had not been recovered or produced. Then he went on to make great play with the so-called experts in handwriting, "these gentlemen who would play fast and loose with a human life on the turn of a comma or the tail of a 'q'." He laughed them to scorn over the false letter written by Arthur Marshall, and Maria's reproduction of her father's signature.

"My learned friend," he said, "referred to this production with something like a sneer, as another proof of my client's versatility. Gentlemen, is it to be said that on that account she is a potential murderess? 'It proves her command over her pen as well as her paint-brush,' says my learned friend. I agree! and, for that very reason, she cannot be the author of the incriminating correspondence. Had she had a mind to conceive such letters she had a hand to execute them, but she certainly would, as it is proved she could, have concealed her identity by means of disguised penmanship, which she had sufficient dexterity to accomplish."

The medical evidence as to the cause of Haviland's death he did not seek seriously to controvert.

"And now," the great advocate resumed in changed and buoyant tones—for, despite his youth and comparative inexperience, great advocate he had shown himself to be—"I might here, in ordinary circumstances, have intimated that my labour of love is at an end. The Solicitor-General, in the discharge of what he conceives to be his public duty, has arraigned before this High Court a young, gentle, refined, sweet-natured woman on a charge of the foulest of crimes, the calculated, cold-blooded assassination of one of her closest friends. That charge, I make bold to say, it is his duty to prove up to the hilt, or I am entitled, not as an act of leniency and grace, but as the merest justice, to claim at your hands a triumphant verdict of acquittal. I have shown you how he has failed to prove even the *corpus delicti*, the fact that the generous Haviland was murdered by any one. He has excluded neither the possibility of suicide nor of misadventure. I have shown you how he has failed to prove that the unhappy prisoner and the dead man were even in each other's company on the fatal night. I have shown you the inconsistency, the inconceivability of a young woman, loved, cherished, and respected by every man, woman, and child who knew her, suddenly and inexplicably descending to the depths of degradation here imputed to her. I have shown you how her conduct before and after the death of Haviland is consistent only with innocence and not guilt. Am

I to be required to do more? Is it to be suggested that it rests on this young girl to prove her innocence, that it does not rest on her accuser, armed with all the powers of the majesty of the law, to prove her guilt? Nay, truly! The burden is on him; not on her.

"But even from that task I do not shrink; and I say to you, gentlemen, that the dramatic and unheard-of events which have this day come to light can leave no doubt in the mind of any reasonable man, not only that my client is not proved to be guilty, but that she is convincingly and conclusively proved to be innocent."

He then drew attention to the significant and suggestive importance of the puncture-marks on the arms of Haviland, Maria, and Parker respectively, and the fact that, except in the dead hand of Parker, no hypodermic needle had been found. If, in spite of all he had urged, the jury could reconcile it with their consciences to say that it had been proved that Haviland was in the house that Sunday evening, what did these things mean?

"Consider," he continued, "the evidence we have heard to-day. Putting aside the servants on the upper floor, four persons inhabited that house of mystery—Mr Langworthy, his servant Saul Parker, Miss Christine O'Mara, and my client, Miss Maria Langworthy. Mr Langworthy is a well-known, highly-respected gentleman of enormous wealth and boundless generosity, yesterday lying chained to his couch in the drawing-room, or at best only able to move about on crutches, helpless and infirm."

Here Arthur Marshall, the old clerk, bent forward, and nodded energetically and sympathetically.

"Miss Christine O'Mara is a young, quiet, and inoffensive relative, living with him on his bounty, afflicted with a painful deformity, and racked by suffering, a young woman placid, unassuming, and helpful. Are either of these two likely to have been actuated by a deadly, revengeful hatred of a young man constantly an honoured guest of the house?

"I have every respect for my friend Mr Pennifeather; but, read in the light of reason, his theories and imaginings about the identity of Mr Langworthy, or the per-

sonation of him by his brother James, seem too incredible for calm consideration. Could his niece, who lived and worked with him, have been deceived? And we all must have been touched by the artless and spontaneous instant denial of Mr Pennifeather's conclusions uttered by the trembling lips of Christopher Langworthy's daughter to-day."

Again the old clerk intimated his silent approval, and Mr Pennifeather shrugged his shoulders in disdain.

"Gentlemen," Robert resumed impressively, "that group of three persons was housed in that mansion no later than yesterday. A mysterious call for help came from Mr Langworthy to Mr Pennifeather. What the message was we are not, by our beneficent rules here, entitled to know; but safely may I conjecture that Mr Langworthy feared, lest by some dastardly subterfuge he should be prevented from giving evidence to-day that would fix responsibility for this murder upon the true criminal.

"That call for help was answered—all honour to Mr Pennifeather!—and what do we find? The lame man has been spirited away, no one knows whither. Christine O'Mara too has been removed, no one knows by whom. But Parker, the confidential servant, who pervaded that house, has been found there dead. You heard the wonderful and incredible story of the vast fortune he held in his heavy, helpless hand. What make you of that? Was it blackmail, or a stupendous bribe by the agonised father to induce this fiend to spare him that he might save the life of his child? We are lost in a maze of conjecture; but of this one thing we are certain: A dark and sinister man of disguise, a 'fantastical duke of dark corners' was this same Parker; and the invalid and the deformed Christine were alike at his mercy. Where they are now I believe that Parker alone could have told us; but, by the interposition of Providence, he seems to have died in his iniquity. His master and his master's niece, where are they? Even as I speak, I seem to see him creep into the room of this unsuspecting prisoner when asleep, and infuse the narcotic drug into her arm.

I seem to see him strike the lethal needle into the hapless Haviland, and pour the deadly poison into his helpless jaws. It is but the work of a moment then to carry the sleeping Maria down from her room, and, having filled his victim's pockets with the forged letters, to thrust him forth to die, and await with silent malice the doom of Maria. Is this a picture of wild imagination? Nay, truly; for, in that secret recess, last night, was the murderer discovered, holding in his straining fist the loathly instrument of death."

Spellbound we listened to this graphic and dramatic word-picture, almost visualising the scene conjured up by the vivid force of the description.

"And now," he said at last, "I am about to draw to a conclusion. Fain would I hold you, as Jacob struggled with the angel and would not let him go until he blessed him, but I can no more. There is an old Anglo-Saxon poem which tells of a dragon against which the straightest arrow, the sharpest spear, or the keenest sword-blade was powerless to prevail. Only the naked grasp of an honest man's hand could drag the creature to its well-earned doom and bring victory to the avenger. And so I come before you to-day, disdaining the swords and spears of effusive rhetoric, the tricks and snares of subtle phrase and honeyed flattery. I bring you nothing but the grip of a man's hand; and, face to face, as man to man, I do not beg, or entreat, or cajole—I demand, in the name of eternal truth and justice, the freedom, the vindication, the life of this woman, at the hands of you, men!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE JUDICIAL IMPARTIALITY OF LORD PITTENWEEM.

THE long silence that followed the concluding sentences of the great counsel's peroration was broken at length by the harsh and sonorous accents of the presiding Judge.

"No one," he said, with a certain courtliness altogether foreign to his nature, "no one can remain unmoved by the masterly and impressive address to which we have all listened with admiration, and that whether we agree with its tenor and conclusions or no. In order that we may have an opportunity to recover the necessary judicial equipoise, I propose that we now adjourn for quarter of an hour."

Accordingly he rose stiffly from his chair and tottered off the bench, while the jury also slowly filed out.

No injustice is done to the crabbed and cranky old gentleman by the expression of my own conviction that, at that moment, he knew not which way his duty pointed him. He had been foiled in his endeavour to subdue and overawe the daring young counsel who had audaciously refused to be brought to heel. Where he had anticipated the humble subserviency too often accorded him, he had been met with respectful but firm determination and independence; and he did not like it. But it may be that the embers of his cold old heart had been kindled into a feeble imitation of sympathetic fire by the stirring and forceful words he had heard, and therefore he desired a few minutes' grace to regain his normal condition of mind. Be that as it may, while no one seeks to deny that, in his subsequent handling of the jury, he was actuated solely by a desire to do what

he thought his duty, his conception of that duty did not appeal to me, or to any other member of the Bar who heard him, as either fair or judicial. There I leave the matter.

Meantime Maria sat behind the bar of the court, dazed and semi-conscious, pale and silent as her counsel himself, who remained in his place at the table, immovable and unapproachable. Gently and almost imperceptibly he stretched his hand across the intervening rails, and in a moment it was seized by the slim white fingers of her ungloved hands, and covered with grateful kisses.

"Robert!" she murmured, "dear, loyal, faithful, clever Robert! Never shall I forget what you have done for me to-day!"

He only pressed her hand in a warm reassuring clasp, and gently disengaged himself, as Hamish Stuart, sad and worn, stood beside his chair. For the first time since that fatal night these two looked into each other's eyes as friends, while Hamish whispered some broken words of admiration and thanks.

She cast a pitiful glance of wounded pride and affection at the man who was to have been her husband; then, burying her face in the broad bosom of the matron beside her—a kindly creature for all her case-hardening occupation—she lay there, sobbing, quietly but bitterly.

Candlès, protected by great glass globes like old-fashioned "toddy rummers," were placed on the Judge's desk, for it was growing dusk; and, seated behind the titful flickering light that they threw, the queer old figure, in his priest-like robes of white and scarlet, adorned with red crosses in front, began his charge to the jury. In a moment it was obvious to all on which side of the fence he had chosen to descend. Pittenween was himself again, dour and obstinate, sarcastic and implacable as ever.

He began by making great play with the concluding portion of Robert's address. The whole incidents of the previous day in the house in Queen Anne Square were to be contemptuously disregarded as irrelevant. "We are here, gentlemen," he said, with perfect truth, "to

inquire into the cause of the death of Mr Haviland on the 18th or 19th of June last, not into the circumstances, however mysterious, surrounding the death of the man Parker yesterday. Now you have it in evidence that the man Parker was in Glasgow on the night of the murder"—he constantly and consistently took the murder for granted—"and that is surely sufficient. The ingenious speculations of the witness Pennifeather, and the equally fantastic theories of the learned counsel as to the true reason for the disappearance of Mr Langworthy and his niece, are alike beside the point. The learned counsel suggests that they have been spirited away in order to prevent their giving evidence in favour of the prisoner. You will judge of the likelihood of that when I point out to you that the names of these witnesses appear, not in the list for the prisoner, but in the list for the Crown. It might as well be urged that they have stayed away—nay, it might be urged with more plausibility—because they knew that their evidence would be fatal to the prisoner; and," he added with great significance, "if there be any truth in the charge on which she is now arraigned, I, for one, would not gainsay the possibility of her having succeeded in silencing, and effectually silencing, her father, her cousin, and the serving-man, as well as her previous unfortunate victim."

Here was judicial impartiality with a vengeance! Even the Crown prosecutor lifted his eyebrows in silent protest; Robert's face grew whiter and sterner than ever, and the old clerk clutched his scrubby beard with agitated fingers; while the prisoner herself raised a shocked, almost indignant face to the figure crouching over his desk on the bench.

The ominous three-cornered hat evidently impeded his clear view of the jury, and so, with fingers that seemed to itch to place it on his head, he handled it lovingly, as he removed it to the other side of his chair.

Then he went at it, tooth and nail, with the gloves off. "It is said by a large body of respectable witnesses," he said, "that the prisoner is a young woman possessed of many amiable and virtuous qualities. That is their

opinion, and, so far as they have had opportunity of observing, probably an opinion well founded. But, gentlemen, you are to judge of the character of the prisoner, not by what other people, however respectable, may say or think; you are to judge of her by the facts that are proved!" and he rapped his angry, gnarled old knuckles on the desk before him. "And therefore, gentlemen," he continued with a snarl, "it is necessary, in the first place, that I should call your attention to the letters that have been produced."

And he read the letters. As I live, he actually read them aloud, all over again, in open court, with senile, salacious enjoyment.

"The first in date!" he went on, "is admittedly in the handwriting of the prisoner. You are the judges, but I put it to you, as men of the world and men of common-sense"—always a safe compliment to the average juror—"whether you have any doubt but that the others are in the same handwriting, and whether they are not all sent with the same object, namely, to entice the person to whom they are addressed to an interview with the writer in that room from which they are addressed?"

Then metaphorically he tore to tatters the "flimsy pretence," as he called it, that there was any room for the plea of forgery. The second letter, like the first, was written in the presence of Mr Stuart, posted in the ordinary way, and received next morning, as the jury had heard. Again, he said, they were the judges; but, once they made up their minds that the prisoner was the author of the letters—and he could suggest no reasonable ground for doubt—they went a long way indeed towards the solution of the question they were there to try.

"And, if you are driven to that conclusion," he jerked out angrily, while a hectic spot of red appeared above each high cheek-bone, and his beady eyes darted fire, "you will then consider, from the proper standpoint, the value of the evidence of the prisoner's good character. It is worse than misleading to suggest that she is so mild and good and virtuous that she could not have written

the letters, if it be proved to your satisfaction that she did write them. The respectable persons, who truthfully said that they believed her to be all that is noble and pure, were drawing conclusions from false and imperfect premises, because, had they known that she was capable of such productions as these, the fact that they are respectable persons would cause them to modify, indeed to reverse, their favourable opinions."

Having thus, to his own great satisfaction, reduced the poor prisoner's reputation to a thing of shreds and patches, the pleasant elderly gentleman took the bit in his teeth and proceeded to romp home. He scoffed at the suggestion of any hiatus in the evidence as to Haviland's presence in the house on the Sunday night. Again the jury were entreated to regard the question from that problematical position, the point of view of men of common-sense and men of the world. "If you have no other reason," he said, "for travelling from North Berwick to Edinburgh on a Sunday, except that you have received an invitation to visit a certain house, and if, after its receipt, you suddenly make up your mind to go, and are so anxious to arrive that you actually walk miles to catch a train, it is surely a rational inference that your reason for so doing is the invitation you have received. I have to tell you that there is sufficient evidence for you to consider whether that conclusion is not just and sound."

Going on to describe the finding of Harry on the doorstep at midnight, he actually protested that "the victim's dying words" might be construed as an accusation of Maria, and his cry to save her an exhibition "of the generous and magnanimous spirit of a generous and magnanimous youth."

"Besides," he added, thumping the desk again, "I am by no means satisfied that we have heard the whole truth of this matter—but again you are the judges. I should have desiderated some more specious reason for the immediate visit of Mr Stuart and the other two at that time of night." Here he went out of his way to pay fulsome compliments to "the able and distinguished counsel Mr Hamish Stuart, so well known and respected

in these Courts," to which Hamish listened with a look of unmitigated disgust. "But," said he, tapping once more, "it will be for you to consider what was the true reason that caused these three persons to make their way at once to that particular scene."

Attacking Robert's plea that a murderess would have destroyed the evidence of her guilt, he remarked drily that, "fortunately for the ends of justice, such persons"—and, nodding emphatically, he pointed, with a sneer that made one's blood boil, at the quivering face of the woman he assailed—"such persons are not always so clever as they think they are."

Lastly, he told the jury that there was no question as to the cause of death; and, after a few more pungent sentences, informed them, grudgingly enough, that, if they had any reasonable doubt, they must give the prisoner the benefit, but if not, they were to return such a verdict as would do them honour! And having thus nobly fulfilled his judicial function, he lay back breathing heavily, while the macers conveyed the jury to their retiring-room.

I do not hesitate to confess, as Lord Hermand once said of Lord Kames in the bad old days, that I was thankful I had no pistol in my hand, for I could cheerfully have shot him where he sat. Nowhere was the effect of this unexpected harangue more noticeable than on the other side of the bar. Golightly, the advocate-depute, hung his great head, and when the gratified procurator-fiscal ventured some smiling observation, turned on him with a characteristic imprecation that must certainly have been heard on the bench. The Solicitor-General grew red and pale by turns, tore to shreds quill after quill, and ostentatiously turned his back on the Judge when he leaned over to speak to him.

"Tell the Solicitor-General I want him!" Pittenweem croaked angrily to the Clerk of Court.

"Tell his lordship that, in the meantime, I am otherwise engaged," the Solicitor returned incisively, and made his way to say a word of guarded hope to Robert, who had not seemed to breathe since the charge began.

Slowly and steadily the fateful moments went by.

Now and then a gown rustled, an uneasy cough was heard, or a sharp word of command issued from the corridor, when one of the doors swung open. But the clock in the gallery, that had looked down on many such a woeful scene, kept on its regular, monotonous, maddening tick! tick! tick! louder and clearer every instant, it seemed to me, as if already it had begun to measure the remaining span of a young girl's life.

That sudden, nerve-racking, jangling bell rang out insistently, and the jury returned. I did not dare look at them as their names were called. Yes, they were there, all fifteen of them!

"Gentlemen, are you agreed upon your verdict?"

A twitching, nervous, middle-aged member rose spasmodically with a paper in his hand.

"The jury, by a majority, find the charge against the prisoner not proven."

One universal sigh of relief witnessed to the tension which all in Court had endured. The Solicitor-General's face relaxed into a smile, for he had been inwardly cogitating whether he could retain sufficient composure to move for sentence in the event of an adverse verdict. Glad as I was at the escape from imminent danger, tears of mortification stood in my eyes at the ungenerous wording of the acquittal, and I saw, through a mist, old Arthur Marshall rise, as if to shake his fist in the face of the presiding Judge, and then subside again, muttering through clenched teeth—

"Oh! my God! my God! Not that! It is almost worse than death!"

"The prisoner is discharged!" cried the Clerk of Court briskly, in business-like tones.

But Pittenweem was not done with her yet. His cheeks, his lips, his very eyes became suffused and engorged with blood. He saw red, if ever man did. For the time he seemed to lose command of himself entirely, as he glared upon the prisoner with the baffled malevolence of a tiger cheated of his prey.

"Prisoner at the bar!" he shouted, in tones of actual ferocity, "stand up!"

Trembling and faint, Maria rose obediently.

"A respectable jury——" he began, with a sneering side glance.

But he got no further. The "prisoner at the bar" had fallen in a deep swoon to the ground. With compressed lips and blazing eyes, Robert rose, the picture of outraged wrath and determination, and motioned peremptorily to the attendants to unlock the gates of the bar.

Then, gathering the fainting child in his arms with infinite compassion, he turned haughtily to the bench, unflinching and indomitable.

"This lady," he exclaimed, with quiet and icy dignity, "is no longer a prisoner! She is not now in the hands of the Court, nor does she desire the honour of your lordship's further conversation!"

With head erect, and calm unhastening step, he turned contemptuously on his heel and carried his lovely burden away through the folding-doors held open by willing and sympathetic hands.

How often have I recalled the sweet vision of that dear unconscious face, resting in childlike confidence upon his stalwart shoulder! And well may I recall it often, for it was the last glimpse these eyes ever beheld of fair Maria Langworthy!

Meantime the enraged scarlet-robed figure on the bench recovered some of the breath that had been knocked out of his body by this defiant protest.

"Stop him! Bring him back!" he shrieked, "This is a paradeful triumph over justice! Solicitor-General! Mr Proudly! Is this High Court to be flouted——?"

To his credit be it said, he ceased as suddenly as he had begun. One amazed glance at the unfriendly faces on both sides of the table seemed to give him pause and bring him to his senses. Whether it was that the meaning and pathos of the scene then struck him for the first time, whether he began to realise that after all he might be entirely in the wrong, and the helpless woman on whom he had poured the vials of his vituperation might be not only young and beautiful, but

innocent as well—whether a touch of remorse suddenly struck that flinty old heart, or whether a sudden light burst in, illuminating his perverse mind with the thought that he might have been wickedly and woefully unjust and unkind, I know not. Certain it is that his next sentences were couched in very different language.

“Gentlemen of the jury,” he stammered, “I did not mean—I never intended—no one is more sincerely and heartily pleased than I that you have seen your way to return this verdict, no one more certain that justice has been done! My own days cannot be long now; but, if ever the veil be wholly lifted from the mystery which you and I have been investigating, I pray Heaven that we may all be spared to see! Gentlemen, you are discharged.”

Whatever may happen in the case of others, the pious aspiration of that queer and contradictory old character was not destined to be fulfilled, so far as he was concerned. He lingered for some years, grumbling and slumbering in one of the Appeal Divisions. Then, as he would have said, he “slipped away.”

My appointed task in these memoirs now draws to a conclusion.

Maria Langworthy, as I have said, I never saw again. After a long interview with Honoria, the import of which I have never learned to this day, Hamish Stuart, in a resigned and chastened spirit, returned to his old home in Palace Street, where Robert and he were once more reunited after their short and painful estrangement. One evening I was called upon, along with old Arthur Marshall, to sign, as a witness, an assignation of some sort by Robert in favour of Hamish. I do not know what that deed conveyed, but Marshall seemed thoroughly pleased for some secret reason, and even emitted a raven-like chortle when he wrote his name under mine.

“I have been a careful steward, Hamish,” Robert said, as he delivered the document, “and I could not resign it

into better hands, or to a more faithful custodier than you, my dear boy!"

Hamish shook hands with us both, fervently and affectionately; and he went his way to win name and fame abroad.

As for the indefatigable Pennifeather, he had not been idle. Smarting under the castigation he had received in Court, both from Robert and Pittenweem, he pursued his investigations with all his characteristic thoroughness, and, as a result, there was soon a hue and cry through the length and breadth of the land for the missing man James Langworthy, who had murdered his brother in the train, taken his place, annexed his wealth, and, in all probability, had killed his man-servant as well as Harry Haviland.

But James Langworthy was never found. The money turned itself again and again in the hands of Mr Poole, advised and assisted by Robert. The house in Queen Anne Square was shut up, and the whole nine days' wonder soon faded from public memory. As did Pittenweem, so do I, still await the true solution of this perplexing mystery.

But, the pity of it all! the pity of it! Often, amid the comfortable and prosaic surroundings of our domestic happiness, I find myself lost in wondering speculation over the events of these brief summer months. What was it that brought about that disastrous termination of our intimate and fresh-hearted intercourse? What secret, occult, driving force, what "devilish agency," as Robert justly called it, was responsible for the degeneration of Haviland's manhood? How was his restless spirit urged from its equipoise of sane outlook and conduct, and overwhelmed by that violent death whose cause and occasion are alike unsolved and unknown? For that there was some spirit of evil, some sinister compulsive power, goading him on against his better nature and instincts to betray his loyalty to Hamish and friendship, I have no doubt whatever. The Circean bowl of enticement, the irresistible longing that dragged him back to Edinburgh,

were these only metaphors, hallucinations, "daggers of the mind," or, in deed and truth, tangible and physical realities? Who wrote the letters, if Maria did not? If she wrote them herself, was she too under the spell of some pervading vile and commanding domination? For, in the belief in her own natural innate purity and goodness, like Robert himself, I have never wavered. And where now does she hide her poor bruised heart? The dreadful verdict that clings like the leper's curse, calling aloud to all to beware of her, is surely a burden too terrible for her to bear. Robert smiles pitifully at times, and says that she is safe. And happy? Happy as she can ever be while that iniquitous decision still stands unexpunged on the records of Court. Safe she may be, "for aye in shady cloister mewed," in some retired cell of simple sisterhood, where that young and verdant life shall wither slowly and sorrowfully away in secluded maidenhood. Ah, Robert! how could you let her go? How often do I seem to see you again confronting that infuriated old blusterer, holding the dear unconscious figure in your arms! and how fervently have I wished to Heaven that you two had never parted again! For though you go your victorious way amongst men—calmly self-reliant, sensible, courteous, and considerate, a very perfect gentleman as you always were—your heart is empty, and your hearth is cold! You loved her, Robert—you love her still. Deserted by her father, renounced by her betrothed,—for good and ill, now and always, you have loved her; and she is lost!

—Yes, Honoria, my dear, I shall be with you directly;—I am just finishing an important paper, a matrimonial cause of some intricacy and difficulty!

Honoria must never know—never! Loyal and faithful to her as I am in my heart of hearts, how can I forget the dear dead days of that enchanted summer time? Not always is even the wisest and the noblest of us master of his own inmost thoughts and imaginings; and sometimes, in the calm and quiet of my peaceful fireside felicity, it is borne in upon me with

irresistible conviction that even I—"Proudly the magniloquent and grandiloquent," as Harry used to say, when I was the willing target for their good-natured raillery—even I must sometimes confess to myself that I have loved her too!

—Yes, Honoria, my dear! I have finished—quite, quite finished! I come! I come!

BOOK IV.

FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER.

THE SOLUTION OF PENNIFEATHER'S PROBLEMS.

“Then old age and experience, hand in hand,
Lead him to death, and make him understand,
After a search so painful and so long,
That, all his life, he has been in the wrong.”

—ROCHESTER: *A Satyr against Mankind.*

CHAPTER I.

NEW TENANTS, BUT OLD FRIENDS.

ON the evening of the fifteenth anniversary of the death of Harry Haviland, Mr Horatio Proudly, Q.C.,—or, to give him the name that had stuck to him ever since the occasion of his introduction to Mr Langworthy, Mr Counsellor Proudly,—the new proprietor of the house in Queen Anne Square, stood on the hearthrug of his handsomely-furnished drawing-room, now restored to its pristine dimensions. Though years had intervened since his appearance at the celebrated trial, time had written few wrinkles on his benevolent brow. His eye had not become dim, in spite of the tell-tale double eyeglass that dangled at the end on a black watered-silk ribbon on his extensive shirt front—nor was the natural force of his idiomatic eloquence abated. Prosperity had, perhaps, tended rather to increase his idea of his own importance, and a large and steady practice at the Bar had, as he would have expressed it, broadened his outlook upon all mundane affairs (it may be, however, that it had only rendered him—appropriately—case-hardened). His antipathies, like his youthful affections and predilections, had become softened by time and distance; and he could even refer to his *bête noire*, the late Lord Pittenweem, as a “genuine specimen of the ancient traditional school of Scottish Judges, a man of vast juridical abilities, sir—if a trifle abrupt—a trifle abrupt!” Nor were his recollections of the hapless Maria Langworthy any longer tinged with that semi-sentimentalism which characterised the last words he wrote of her, a few years before. Almost was he inclined to think—when he had time to

think on the subject at all—that, when all was said and done, it might be that there was more—aye! far more than met the eye in that old-world story; and the denunciations of Pittenweem, in which he had long indulged, were to be excused as the ebullitions of a chagrined and inexperienced youth, embittered by prejudice and a predisposition to jump at desired conclusions.

For he was still an artist in language, was Mr Counsellor Proudly, Q.C., more picturesque and impressive even than when Robert Montgomery first described him; the thread of his verbosity was drawn out finer than the staple of his argument; and his sentences might be described, with his own felicity of style, as being frequently involved in redundancies and contorted by convolutions, as unexpected as they were obscure.

To-night, as he turned his back to the fireplace and glanced round approvingly upon the goodly proportions of the reception-room of his newly-acquired mansion, his chest expanded with hospitable thoughts of the company even then on its way to eat his house-warming dinner, and he entertained by his flow of informative conversation. Honoria his wife—by this time a rather faded, frightened-looking lady of that age and appearance that kindly critics describe as “well preserved”—sat on a low chair, screening her face from the fire with a fan; and, for want of any one of greater intellectual importance to talk to, he proceeded to address a few well-chosen words to her.

“Plain it is to me,” he observed sententiously, swinging the double eyeglass at the end of its ribbon, “plain it is to me, Honoria, that the inheritor of the Langworthy millions, whoever he or she may be, will be a most fortunate individual!”

“Poor Maria Langworthy!” sighed his wife, “poor dear Maria! Gone these fifteen years, no one knows where! And only to think that it was all intended for her!”

“Intended—aye! and well intended—it may have been,” the Counsellor returned, “but, too often, alas! that which is intended is prevented from becoming that

which is desired through that which is necessary not being performed!"

"This litigation about the Langworthy millions is the talk of the town," the good lady continued. She had long accustomed herself to pursue her own train of thought, undisturbed by the meanderings of her husband. "And the old terrible story is once more in all the papers. Even we are mentioned to-day as the brave people who have had the courage to be the first to occupy this house since the tragedy. It is dreadful! No one knows for certain who Mr Langworthy was, and whether he or Maria is alive or dead."

Mr Proudly placed the tips of his fingers together, in the manner of one expounding an intricate dialectic proposition.

"In the case of the man Langworthy, whoever he may have been," he said, "the law has been invoked. Whether, on the one hand, the former tenant here was really the veritable Christopher, or, on the other, his scheming and self-seeking brother James, the time has now arrived when, for all practical purposes, the demise of both or either of them falls to be declared. Legally, these personages are no more. Under the beneficent rule of the Act of Parliament, each has been presumed by the Court to have departed this life precisely seven years after the man residing here was last known to be alive. Therefore, in the eye of the law, he passed to another, and, let us hope—slender as may be the basis for such an aspiration—a better world, exactly eight years ago. Whether, if Maria was alive after that date she and her representatives inherit, or whether the succession opens to a world of claimants, who are flocking here daily and hourly?—such are the questions," he concluded, with an Appeal Court flourish of the double eye-glass, "that the Court has now to hear and consider, and, after consideration, to resolve, determine, and decide!"

"Poor Maria!" sighed Mrs Proudly, who had been lost in reverie; "you may say what you please, Horatio, but no power on earth can convince me that she did it!"

"None can measure," quoth the Counsellor, overflowing once again, "none can measure the capability and

capacity of man or woman for sudden iniquity and depravity! Strange it was—aye! passing strange—that a gently nurtured, well-behaved young woman (and one, too, who was universally admired and beloved) should suddenly develop the savage grandeur of a Medea and the appalling wickedness of a Borgia! At the same time, Honoria,” he continued in an altered voice, while glancing at the clock, “I dislike the subject! It—it upsets and disconcerts me! To say the least, it is unbecoming to harp on it, in the very house where the deed was done. Besides, our guests will be arriving shortly.”

“And, amongst them, Robert Montgomery! Dear steadfast Robert!” his wife responded, her face lighting up. “Though he is Lord Advocate now, *he* has never wavered in his trust and belief.”

“Nor I, my darling, nor I,” the Counsellor protested hastily. “I yield to no one, not even to Montgomery, in my faith in our sweet lost girl. But, somehow, as the years go by, I have lost that buoyancy of hope that once was mine. I cannot now recall, with such fervency of spirit as in days of yore, the abiding convictions and moral certainties of youth!”

“And yet you too loved Maria!” his wife suggested, with perhaps just a trace of gentle malice.

“In a manner, my love—in a way, my dear!” answered the Q.C., rosy and confused, and fumbling with his silk ribbon. “But really, after all,” he resumed, endeavouring to recover his magisterial composure, “it is a marvellous and disconcerting circumstance that so many of our expected guests should have been actors or art and part in that sad tragedy—Robert Montgomery, Hamish Stuart newly home from the Cape, old Edgar Poole himself—Gad! he must be almost as ancient as that clerk of his, Arthur Marshall, whom he threw at Montgomery and who has stuck like a burr—and Pennifeather as well, Pennifeather of the detective instincts, the ‘policeman,’ as the young reprobates of the Parliament House have dubbed him now, the explorer, and Heaven knows what else!—all coming here to-night! Pshaw!” he added testily, “we shall never get away from the subject!”

"Talking of the Pooles," said Mr Proudly suddenly, "I forgot to say that Eliza Poole wrote asking if she might send the Australian singing woman, Madame Esther Morrell, in her place to-night. She is staying with them."

"Aha!" cried the Counsellor, dropping his glasses, and recovering them nimbly, "that will be some diversion! Morrell! Morrell!" he mused, "is not that one of the names under which Pennifeather said the man Langworthy used to masquerade?"

"That was Merelli, my dear."

"The difference being all in his e'e, my love!" he responded, with ponderous jocularly; and, really refreshed by the consciousness of his own pretty wit, he went on gaily, but graciously—"Truly the music-room shall be reopened to-night with appropriate *éclat*!"

"The music-room!" exclaimed Mrs Proudly apprehensively. "Don't you think, Horatio, that we should avoid that place to-night? The associations cannot but be painful to Hamish Stuart, Robert, and us all!"

The Counsellor looked aggrieved, not to say exasperated.

"We have acquired this house, Honoria," he observed expansively—"at a reasonable figure, it is true, on account of its somewhat unpleasant history—with all its adjuncts, and parts and pertinents, including the chamber to which you refer. However painful may be its associations, these must be lived down! A new atmosphere is to be created; and, towards that creation, methinks the full-throated warbling of the greatest soprano of the day may in no small measure contribute. We shall therefore 'take infestment,' as we lawyers say, after dinner!"

After this portentous pronouncement there was no more to be said; and, recognising the futility of further remonstrance, the lady held her peace.

But now the doors were thrown open, and the guests of the evening began to arrive. They were, for the most part, drawn from that professional class of persons who revolve, in the inner circle, round the sun of the Parliament House in Edinburgh—a class in which the men call each other by their last names and the women call each

other by their first, where every one appears to have been at school with every one else, and where the intimate conversations of riper years consist principally in reminiscences of a more riotous youth, just as Edinburgh herself shines nowadays by the reflected glories of a more brilliant and less respectable past.

Robert Montgomery, now Lord Advocate and Member of Parliament for his native city, came first, tall and gaunt, ceremoniously and punctiliously polite, rather more grey and worn than in the olden days, but still wearing the same aspect of lofty intellectuality combined with a sympathetic human understanding, and the same winning smile betraying the gentle spirit. As ever, he was "the great man who makes us all feel great," but somehow he usually succeeded, at the same time, in making Horatio Proudly feel small, much to that gentleman's chagrin. Not Proudly the Q.C., the proprietor of the noble mansion in which he stood, but Proudly, the humble and admiring junior counsel, welcomed the stately Lord Advocate to his hearth that night. And there, also, was Charles Pennifeather, impenetrable as ever, and even more monosyllabic unless roused, still staring through the eyeglass as if he had slept with it firmly fixed in its place for the last fifteen years; and along with him was Mrs Pennifeather, the "Alice" of poor Haviland's opera, daughter of Ardbuckle, the late Solicitor-General. She was a lively, witty young person, given to poking fun in public at her husband, whom secretly she adored, although she always professed to have married him out of pique when Robert and Mr Proudly both remained impervious to her charms. Needless to say, this little artless fiction rendered her a welcome guest at the flattered Counsellor's hospitable board.

Then came one or two of the glorious army of the unemployed junior Bar, volatile and effervescent, who accepted the invitations of their loquacious host, drank his wine, mimicked his mannerisms, and admired his industry and genuine abilities with equal impartiality.

Bronzed, powerful, and commanding, but with signs and imprints of knowledge gained through suffering

indelibly implanted on his expressive face, Sir Hamish Stuart entered the room. His dark crisp hair had grown grey about the ears; but still, as ever, the straight firm mouth and slightly prognathous jaw, together with his old, easy, self-possessed, erect carriage, proclaimed the born fighter. It was pleasant to see the lines about his eyes curve downwards—a sure sign that smiles and not frowns had marked them there—when he went forward to greet his hostess.

“Hamish!” Mrs Proudly cried, in a flutter of pleased excitement. “Is it really you? really and truly you? I *am* pleased to see you here again!”

“And I you, Honoria!” answered Sir Hamish, holding her hand. “You are exactly as I expected to find you, not one day older!”

In whatever services Sir Hamish had been engaged during his absence, he had evidently not neglected diplomacy.

“Stuart, my dear fellow!” exclaimed Horatio Proudly, without a trace of his usual affectation, “words cannot tell how glad I am!”

The set lines once more softened into a smile, ironical but kindly.

“If words *could* tell it, I am sure you would find them,” he replied.

“And your wife?” interrogated Mrs Proudly timidly. “Is she not with you? You are married, are you not? at least we heard so,” she added in a deprecating tone of nervous inquiry.

“Yes,” he said gravely, “I am married. You will be pleased to meet her, Honoria, I know—but not to-night!”

“She is not in Edinburgh?” inquired the host.

“Not just yet,” Sir Hamish replied, and turned away to greet Robert, whom he had already met, and Pennifeather, whom he had not.

“She will be here to-night!” murmured Pennifeather to him, his lips scarcely moving.

Sir Hamish started slightly.

“Here?” he exclaimed.

“I got my wife to arrange the matter with Eliza Poole.”

"I wonder if I shall have courage to meet her in this very house!" Sir Hamish replied, in an undertone.

"Pooh! after all these years!" scoffed Pennifeather. "Courage! we shall wring the truth from her, if you answer my signals. It is not as if your wife were with you."

"My wife!" Stuart echoed, rather haughtily.

"True, I have not had the pleasure of meeting her; but it might be rather unfortunate if——"

"My wife," Sir Hamish interrupted grimly, "has never heard me even mention this house since the day we were married."

"We are to have an unanticipated delight this evening," the host now proclaimed, clearing his throat, and speaking with self-satisfied importance: "no other than the presence of the far-famed Australian *prima donna*, Madame Esther Morrell!"

"What did I tell you?" muttered Pennifeather to Sir Hamish.

"I arranged that!" little Mrs Pennifeather announced brightly. "My husband incited me. The woman simply haunts us! New York, Philadelphia, Washington, last year; Melbourne and Sydney the year before; and this year, Paris, Milan, and Vienna—at every one of these places my husband has dragged me to the opera, night after night, to hear her sing. And, would you believe it," she added confidentially to the Lord Advocate, "he doesn't know the difference between 'God Save the Queen' and 'Auld Lang Syne'!"

"It seems almost as if the haunting had been on your husband's side, not on the lady's!" the Lord Advocate replied, laughing.

"Do you know her, Mr Pennifeather?" the hostess inquired. "What brings her to Edinburgh?"

"Don't know, 'm sure," said Pennifeather, back to his monosyllabic staccato. "She refuses to sing in this country. But believe she is a Langworthy claimant. Distant cousin, or something."

"That accounts for the Pooles taking her up," said the lady; "but here they come!"

There was but little change in our old friend the

Writer to the Signet. His manner to Robert, indeed, had lost its one-time air of surprised patronage and had become cordial, even at times deferential in the extreme. But his moist eye, and stiff cravat, and large nose, and side-cocked ear, and arresting forefinger were still in evidence; and his air of secret diplomatic anxiety betokened, as before, the bearer of the burdens of the family cares of every landed proprietor in Scotland.

His entrance to the room, however, was shorn of its full effect, for every eye was riveted on the stately figure of the wonderful woman who preceded him. Slim and lissome, yet full-busted and intensely feminine, diffusing about her a faint fragrance that brought back to Hamish with a shudder the crushed, arsenic-eating orchids in the music-room many years ago, with large grey-green eyes and languorous lids—eyes that seemed to scintillate strangely every now and then, and at times to film over, like the reflection of a darkened sky in a deep still pool—a crown of hair, chestnut, venetian-red, golden—all these hues together, and each by turn as the light fell upon it—worn high above her brow and crowned with a glittering tiara of diamonds, a mobile mouth and firmly-moulded little chin—such was the woman who glided into the room with panther-like grace. She was richly dressed, as befitted one of her age, which might have been anything from thirty to thirty-five but was really nearer forty, and wore more diamonds twinkling on her dainty shoes, and a great string of pearls wound about her throat and hanging far down on her bodice in front.

It is idle to deny that a perceptible gasp of admiration emanated simultaneously from the susceptible bosoms of the assembled members of the junior Bar. At any rate, the lady herself perceived it, with the quick responsiveness of the *artiste*, for she bestowed a smile of dazzling enchantment upon the little crowd, while in the very act of going forward to greet her hostess.

"*Incessu patuit dea!*" murmured one of the young gentlemen, famed for his aptness in classical quotation and his devotion to the sex.

Mrs Proudly appeared more shy and frightened than

ever, as Mr Poole completed his introduction of the new arrival, gazing first at her with startled surprise, and then at Sir Hamish and the Lord Advocate, who stood near, both obviously ill at ease and perturbed. Charles Pennifeather glanced covertly from one face to the other, while a faint shade of annoyance seemed to flit across the fair countenance of the lady herself, as if she were disappointed of some sensation she had expected her appearance to provoke.

"For a moment, madam," said the Lord Advocate courteously, after he had been presented, "I was overcome by the strange resemblance you bear to one who was once very dear to us all! Alas! my grief is that it is only a resemblance!"

And again he regarded her dispassionately, but kindly and gently, as was his nature.

She recovered quickly the composure that she seemed to have lost as he spoke. Then she gave her hand to this stately gentleman, and bowed distantly to Sir Hamish.

"I trust that the memories my poor face recalls are pleasant ones," she returned, smiling graciously.

"The tender grace of a day that is dead may never come back to me," he quoted with a sigh, "but the likeness is wonderful!"

Then she was made acquainted with the young advocates who crowded about her joyously.

"And how fares the new house, Proudly?" asked Mr Poole; "quite settled in and comfortable now?"

"The house," returned Mr Proudly jocosely, "is bought, but it has itself taken on a lease—a new lease of life! It may be that there are some who desire no future that will break the ties of the past, but, living here, we shall cast our eyes, not backward but to futurity!"

"Is there then a history connected with the house?" the lady interposed, breaking off in the middle of an interesting duel with the classical scholar. "I know that I had quite a creepy feeling on entering; but we are a superstitious race, we singers!"

"The artistic temperament," said Pennifeather sud-

denly—and the voice and manner were each such a complete reproduction of the host's peculiarities that all but Honoria and her husband himself looked at the speaker with amazement—"the artistic temperament induces forebodings and fancies. May it not be that the sinister reputation in which the passing years have only succeeded in further enveloping this mansion may act and react upon such a sensitive spirit with more accumulated force than that which permeates the souls of meaner mortals?"

Listening to this solemn conundrum, propounded with the utmost gravity, little Mrs Pennifeather stared at her husband, in suspicious wonder as to whether he had become intoxicated, either by the presence of his beloved *prima donna* or by some other material agency.

That lady herself was obviously neither complimented nor impressed.

"Now, what does he mean by that?" she inquired. "Is the house haunted?"

Mr Counsellor Proudly was obviously put out. He hummed and hawed, glancing rather angrily at Pennifeather, amid an embarrassed silence. Then, opening the floodgates, he burst forth with surpassing eloquence—

"Whether this house is haunted or not, I cannot say. But plain it is that, if ever house deserved to be haunted, that house is this house! for in it is said to have been committed one of the foulest murders that ever disgraced the annals of crime. I know," he added, with an apologetic flourish, "that the Lord Advocate does not agree with me. Sometimes I am not quite sure whether I agree with myself. But come! let us change the subject, for madam changes colour!"

Indeed the *prima donna* was passing a dainty lace handkerchief across lips that had grown pale, even under their *soupçon* of artificial aid.

"Murder!" she repeated faintly.

The Lord Advocate shook his head reprovingly at the Counsellor.

"While I have strength and patience granted to me," he said, "I shall continue to protest against the assump-

tion! The unhappy woman was innocent, as innocent, madam, as you!"

Pennifeather looked down, without even the ghost of a smile.

"Yes," said that gentleman, suddenly and confidentially, as he caught sight of the lady looking about her languidly, "it is a large room, is it not? There used to be a partition right across."

Madam turned towards him superciliously.

"It is indeed a beautiful room," she answered coldly. Then, after a pause, "Have we not met before?" she asked.

"He has pursued you, madam, over the whole world," said his wife merrily.

For once in his life Pennifeather looked slightly put out.

"Genius and beauty draw me with a single hair," he remarked gallantly. "It has been one of the delights of my life to follow your recent career, and to listen to your wonderful voice in many lands and towns during the last three years."

She bowed at the compliment, but regarded him with a grain of uneasy suspicion all the same.

"Who is Sir Hamish Stuart?" she asked guardedly, after a few moments' further talk.

Pennifeather became even more confidential than before.

"He is the man," he murmured in her ear, "who was engaged to the young woman that was tried for poisoning her lover in this house."

"Oh!" she said, opening her great fan and shading her face, "and what came of it?"

"He has married since—abroad, somewhere."

"And the young woman?"

"Dead!" he answered laconically.

"And so she passed out of his life—he has quite forgotten her?"

Pennifeather nodded, but, as he caught the swift fire-darting glance that his companion directed towards the subject of their conversation, he was thankful to re-

member that they were sitting, half-concealed, on a window couch.

"I must get to know this Sir Hamish!" she added, in lighter tones.

"Yes!" said Pennifeather, sadly regarding the *prima donna* through half-closed lids, "the sweet girl we all loved is indeed gone! Maria Langworthy is dead!"

"Maria Langworthy!" she exclaimed, raising her voice. "Is that the lady whose fortune Mr Poole tells me I have some chance of inheriting?"

"Ha! another claimant!" cried the Counsellor, in mock desperation.

"Told you so!" said Mr Pennifeather.

"Madam has interests," quoth Mr Poole with great meaning, and inclining his head towards his client, "distinct and maintainable interests. We shall yet surprise you all!"

"And you will plead my cause, dear Mr Proudly," coaxed the lady archly.

"Madam!" retorted the Counsellor, "my very best efforts towards the accomplishment of that which you desire shall be at your disposal when the time arrives. Loveliness and a righteous cause shall spur me on to eloquence!"

"And, as a preliminary incitement," suggested the Lord Advocate, "I understand that we are to be honoured by hearing the voice of Madame Morrell this evening."

She turned graciously towards the speaker.

"I shall be pleased to sing to you, my lord, in the music-room downstairs."

Mrs Proudly vainly tried to stifle a little half-suppressed cry of dismay.

"Madam has divined the existence of the music-room!" the Counsellor ejaculated delightedly.

For a moment she looked slightly embarrassed.

"I saw no piano here," she explained, rather haltingly, "and, as I had been asked to sing, I thought there must be a room for music in such a house as this."

"Quite so! Natural enough!" said the chatty Mr Pennifeather.

But Honoria still remained very grave.

"Now, let us go to dinner!" cried the hospitable host, after an announcement by one of the servants. "Mrs Pennifeather, come with me! You will promise not to flirt! Stuart, I am afraid, there is no lady for you. Please take one of these, our young brethren, under your wing, and keep him in order; and in the meantime," leading Mr Pennifeather with great jocularly to the lady, "I must give you, Madame Morrell, into the custody of our policeman!" and he armed his smiling partner out, chuckling vociferously.

The *prima donna's* start of alarm appeared very real and unaffected indeed.

"Only a nickname," Pennifeather assured her, as he offered his arm, "and just as far as the dining-room—in the meantime!"

As the rest filed out, Mrs Proudly clutched the arm of her partner the Lord Advocate, and drew him back.

"Robert!" she whispered tremulously, "who is that woman?"

He shook his head silently.

"I cannot tell! Do *you* recognise her, Honoria?"

"Horatio is so obstinate," the fragile lady whimpered. "He *would* bring me to this house again, after all these years, and to the music-room, to-night of all nights, the 19th of June! He has forgotten! and he knows nothing—no more than you do—of my interview with Maria after the verdict."

"Nor do I seek to know," he answered. "Had Maria so desired, she would have confided in me herself."

"Yes, yes! But now the whole story is reviving again, and I am afraid, Robert. I don't know how to act, and have no one to advise me!"

"Hush! hush! Honoria," the Lord Advocate replied as before. "Maria chose to bear her own burden through that time of stress: can you not bear it for her now till

all is made plain, as some day, please God! it must? The secret you hold is no disgraceful one. Of that I feel well assured. But come! They will notice our delay. Let us follow!"

And hastily concealing all traces of her agitation, Mrs Proudly allowed her partner to lead her to the dining-room.

CHAPTER II.

THE MISTS BEGIN TO CLEAR.

DINNER was over, and, with the help of the piano on the platform of the music-room, Madame Esther Morrell had assured the company, with many melodious warblings, that she was Titania, and had expressed her admiration and exuberant delight over the strings of pearls and other precious stones presented by Faust to Margaret, with all the trilling cadenzas and abundant appoggiaturas that the composers of these operatic arias had thought requisite and appropriate. It was a wonderful display of skilled but emotionless vocal gymnastics, which called forth the enthusiastic plaudits of the exuberant Mr Proudly, if it left all the others cold. Even the susceptible young gentleman, learned in the law and the classics, shook his head dejectedly, murmuring something about "five-and-twenty minutes of fireworks," as he sadly departed. His companion counsel, having disposed in workmanlike fashion of as much champagne and port as they could carry with dignity, soon followed his example—excusing themselves on the well-understood plea of imaginary "work"—and then wended their ways to the Megatherium Club ball, whither Mrs Pennifeather and certain unmarried young ladies of the party had already betaken themselves. Mr Poole also, alleging his age and many infirmities, asked his hostess to permit him to leave quietly, promising to send his carriage for his fair guest in half an hour.

The servants were handing round coffee and liqueurs, while Madame Morrell, resting from her labours, reclined in a deep chair, inhaling the smoke of a Russian cigarette,

"my one dissipation of the day," as she assured her hostess with a disarming smile, "for we singers must be careful."

Noticing Sir Hamish Stuart standing near, she stretched out a white rounded arm, and offered to him a tiny cup of coffee from a small table at her side.

"I thank you, no!" said Sir Hamish, quietly returning the cup to the table.

"No coffee, Stuart! Why not?" inquired the hostress. He had dined wisely and well, and was now comfortably at peace with all mankind.

"I have not taken coffee after dinner," replied Sir Hamish, with a slight shudder, "for the last fifteen years."

"Dear me! How curious!" said the lady languidly.

"But why not?" the Counsellor insisted.

"Because I am afraid," answered Stuart lightly, and as if dismissing the subject, "that there is poison in the cup!"

Pennifeather leaned forward politely to take the *prima donna's* empty cup from her hand, accidentally upsetting that which she had offered to Sir Hamish.

"I *am* clumsy," said he in great confusion, "always upsetting something!" and he busied himself picking up the pieces, accidentally tapping twice on Sir Hamish's knee as he did so.

"Poison!" repeated madam, startled and puzzled.

"Just means," said Pennifeather reassuringly, in his usual staccato, "afraid it doesn't agree with him!"

"Oh!" sighed the lady, relieved.

"Now!" cried the Counsellor with persuasive geniality, "we are a small company but appreciative, all agog to hear again madam's rare accomplishment! Will you be so good as favour us once more, Madame Morrell?"

"Do you want me to sing?" she asked of Hamish, as she crushed her cigarette in an ash-tray, looking up at him the while under her long lashes.

"If you will be so kind!" he answered politely, if distantly.

"Then I shall sing to you!" she responded softly,

turning away to mount the platform where the piano stood.

"She knows her way! She remembers the step!" thought Honoria distractedly. "What can it mean?"

"In this charming scene of domestic felicity," the singer began smilingly, as she seated herself at the piano, "I shall try something different from my ordinary rôle. Let me sing you a little song in your own language, which some of you may have heard before!"

Lightly, delicately, and with just the right feeling, she touched the keys; and the haunting, half-sad, well-remembered, lilting, minor melody of the last song that the dead boy had written fell upon the listeners' ears:—

"And wakened joys, whose blissfu' power
Pure wedded love alane can tell!
My bonnie wife!"

She sang, oh! so sweetly, simply, and tenderly and she sang it all, every word, from beginning to end, from

"O! weel I mind the happy days"
to

"A' blessin's fa' my bonnie wife,
For aye she will be dear to me!"

and poor Honoria's tears fell fast.

How it hurt! How it burned! How it tugged at the heart-strings of Hamish, sitting there, brooding over the memories of the past, the radiant hopes of his early manhood, when, in that very room, he had listened to the clean, fresh, blithe treble of his lost love, lingering sweetly on the heart-stirring cadences, while the fair songstress glanced, coyly and archly, but altogether trustfully at his upturned face. And now the self-same strains echoed in his ears again, and the voice was the voice of a siren, and the face that looked down on his was the face of a woman versed in the ways and wiles of the world! But, even as she sang, the old influence and glamour stole over him, and it was with a positive physical effort that he mastered himself sufficiently to murmur a word of conventional thanks, when the be-

witching voice trembled into silence—while the unconscious Proudly applauded loudly and vociferously.

"You know the song?" the lady asked carelessly, smiling the while, with dreamy eyes fixed on Hamish.

"Never heard it before!" cried the unknowing Counsellor; "but it was beautiful—divine! So simple, so natural, so——"

"So appropriate!" the lady suggested, still smiling.

Honorias damp handkerchief was twisted to a wisp-like rag. Pennifeather kept his eye steadily on Sir Hamish, tapping unconsciously on his chair at intervals. With the exception of the enthusiastically complimentary Counsellor, the Lord Advocate alone seemed unconscious of any undercurrent of emotion. Did the verses recall no memories to him?

"Beside the firelicht's fitfu' glow
She ponders aft wi' wistfu' e'e,
While sweet bairn-faces come and go,
Foreshadowing them, some day may be!"

Ah! did not every line and phrase bring back the dear dead boy, and the maid, whose song this usurper had somehow, somewhere filched and appropriated? But he spoke no word, and gave no sign.

"Pray, madam," implored the Counsellor, "do not leave the piano! Give us more, just once again—one song!"

Her hands wandered fitfully over the keys, as if seeking for a half-remembered theme, airs and melodies reminiscent of bygone days with which her hearers must have been vaguely familiar, and all the while she smiled that secret, meaning, and far-off smile.

"Yes," she said at last, rousing herself, "I shall sing again, and this time a lay which none of you can possibly have heard."

With firm fingers she smote the keys, and great compelling chords crashed out. As the volume of sound filled the room, re-echoing "from the roofs and walls, as if dead priests were laughing in their stalls," there rose upon the air the strange, overpowering, passionate fragrance of the weird flowers that used to blaze in a

riot of colour beside the piano. It was a mere association of memories, it may be, for no such forbidding emblems had blossomed there in their poisoned cups for many a long year. And yet the air seemed charged with that half-forgotten odour. Even the singer sensed the insidious perfume. Her eyes now scintillated with gleaming flashes, now melted into slumberous tenderness; her little nostrils quivered, and her bosom rose and fell, the scarlet lips curling with scornful and passionate disdain, or curving into fascinating lines of smiling invitation, as she declaimed a pæan in praise of Circe—gloating and triumphing over the degradation and despair of her victims!

It was! It was the song that Hamish had heard when first his ear was pressed against the outer window on that woeful night!

Half-dazed, he almost started from his seat, but the firm grasp of Pennifeather restrained him; and, mingling with the overwhelming sensuous odours of the flowers of the dead past, that passionate soul-subduing voice sent forth its glorious notes:—

“Hail we now thy justice, Circe!
For the sands of fate have run,—
Headlong, drive them without mercy,
See! the spell's dread work is done!
Anguished, voiceless, let them lie,
Wallowing in the encrusted sty,

Bound in the relentless chains of Circe, daughter of the Sun!

Bound in these relentless chains,
By the hog-trough and the pen,
Burdened with a brute's dull pains,—
Mourn they now, who erst were men!
Vain their dumb imploring, Circe!
Drive them headlong without mercy!

Shall they crave thy pardon now, who braved thy righteous anger
then?

Let them crave, and strive, and mourn
O'er their manhood, lost, undone!—
Nought can change thy will, nor turn
Thy fell vengeance, here begun!
Swine they lived, and swine shall die,
Chained in the accursed sty!

Fiercely burns thy wrath consuming, Circe, daughter of the Sun!”

Well might the exuberant purveyor of classical quotation have repeated his appropriate exclamation then had he remained to hear and see! A goddess in truth, but a goddess of evil! a sorceress, a vampire, preying on the bodies and souls of men, and debasing them to the beasts that perish! The breath of Hamish came thick and fast, the fumes of that inciting fragrance clouded his reeling brain, and great beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. With an iron grip he held himself together, vainly endeavouring to drag his dimming eyes from the languorous smile—inviting, alluring, commanding—of this new-born daughter of the Sun, who had so insolently proclaimed and gloried in her power.

The cool calm tones of the voice of Robert Montgomery fell upon his ear like the healthful breeze of a sweet spring day, and the spell was broken.

“I, for one, have known these words for years, Madame Esther Morrell!” he said. “‘Fiercely burns thy wrath consuming, Circe, daughter of the Sun!’ I know them by heart, and often have I pondered what they meant and what they led to. Can *you* tell, Madame Morrell?” And, as Mr Proudly, now completely sobered and acutely observant, ticked them off, phrase by phrase, Robert repeated the fragmentary sentences: “‘When did I write that? and why does her wrath consume me now? The agonies of unsatisfied remembrance that have confused my vain efforts at recollection ever since that dreadful, crashing cataclysm return with overwhelming power. Who is Circe, and what the ingredients of her potion? The letters burn into my brain, in characters of fire, that Maria is she. But it cannot be! Should I not have known? Should memory not have awakened within me? Would that I could recall the vaguest hint of the place and time when first I knew the thrilling power! Somewhere, somehow, it has been with me once again, an essence, a delight, a spirit, a languorous temptation! Oh! the agonies of unsatisfied desire to taste again that Circean poison! Where was I—where? The key is in the letters. Angel or devil, I can resist no longer. The anguished longing

for that divine enchantment thrills to my inmost heart. I go—I go—whither!”

Pennifeather, Hamish, and Honoria listened to the recitation of these impassioned reflections and aspirations in silent amazement.

“It is the song!” Hamish exclaimed at length, in accents half-articulate and with labouring breath, “the song I listened to on that accursed night! Who are you, woman? Whence do you come? What message have you for all of us—for me?”

She glided slowly down amongst them, her arms extended, her eyes slumberous, and her whole body rigid.

“What can it be to you now, Hamish Stuart, who I am or whence I come?” she wailed in heart-broken accents—“you who never understood and had no pity! Urged on by the fever in his heart and brain, the scarce conscious longing for that essence, spirit, fire, which once unknowingly he had tasted, whose influence surrounded and enwrapped him day by day—an overmastering, all-absorbing power blinding men to honour, purity, right, friendship, and truth—of which none but the initiated know, caring not at last whether the siren were Maria or not, he made straight for this place on this night, fifteen years ago!”

“God bless my soul!” whispered Mr Proudly, wiping his brow, “the 19th of June! So it is!”

“A female figure beckoned him from the door. She threw aside her dark mantle, and behold, there stood a woman, whom never in his conscious life could he remember having seen before! Shall I describe her?” she continued, while the strange smile stole over her face once again. “A figure and face like Maria’s, bereft of its virginal purity; hair of the same colour as hers, but flowing down only to her shoulders, unbound. Harry gazed upon her in mystified amazement.

“‘I am afraid,’ he stammered, ‘that there must be some mistake, I——’

“She seized his hands in hers, and, even as she did so, a slight sharp sensation of pain shot through his arm. He passed his hand across his eyes and looked

again. Then with a great rush of tenderness and emotional surprise, he exclaimed delightedly—

“‘Why! You are—you are Min! My own beloved Min!’

“‘Yes!’ she cried; ‘I am indeed Min, your own beloved Min!’ and in a moment they were in each other’s arms.

“‘Min! you—here!’” he repeated wonderingly.

“‘Oh! Harry, you forget so soon!’ she answered sorrowfully. ‘It is little more than a week since the night of the ball!’

“Again he passed his hand across his eyes.

“‘Yes! I remember now!’ he responded. ‘’Twas here we met once again after that long parting. You are a vision that comes to me, and then I go away and spend hours of anguish in trying to recall you! But still I do not understand how you are you, and yet here!’

“‘I am always here, Harry,’ she returned sadly. ‘I never forget! Would God I could! I have been at your side daily and yet you never knew. Look!’

“She retired to a dark part of the room, drew the dark cloak about her, covering her lustrous hair. Then, with a skilful twist of her shoulders, she seemed to give an appearance of flattened deformity to her sinuous frame, and, limping forward, stood before him.

“It was Christine O’Mara!”

“Great God!” cried Mr Pennifeather, striking his brow. “I understand it all at last!”

“Then,” the woman continued in a sort of low monotonous chant, “they drank together of the potion of Circe. Do not ask what that potion is, for I dare not tell! Who learns that dread secret is lost—lost for evermore; lost! lost!” and she swayed back and forth, in an abandonment of sorrow.

“The scent-laden flowers were there,” she went on as before, “nestling in their gorgeous beauty among the death-dealing waters. Harry gathered them in his arms, played with them, poured the poisonous draughts from cup to cup with wild laughter and mad caprice. She grew terrified, imploring him to cease, and then betrayed

the well-guarded secret of her glorious voice. She sang the songs of Circe—fatal mistake!—even the song written for Maria; and Harry's gradually cooling ardour was turned to thoughts of her, whom she strove to make him forget. Hark! A sudden thunderous noise at the window! She leans forward eagerly to listen, and in a moment his eyes are fully opened. 'You are the woman of my dream!' he cried.

"'I am Min, the woman you love,' she responds.

"'Yes!' he cries again, 'but I recognised you now, as you listened. You are the woman at the window! What have you done with the murdered body?'

"Suddenly infuriated, she turns on him in frantic rage, sneering at him and mocking, scoffs at his pure boyish love for Maria, and warns him of what he has now irretrievably become. Even as she is, so shall he be, always, always! never again free from the influence and craving that have been implanted in him, never released for one brief moment from the chain by which she can drag him at her chariot wheels, or the burden of consuming, unsatisfied desire—never more pure and good, faithful and true, his life ruined, his ambitions blighted, his hopes blasted for ever!

"In an agony of shame, misery, and despair he seizes and drinks to the dregs the fatal life-blood of the flowers. Overcome with terror and remorse, she finds strength to hurl him to the street through the secret door and flees to her room. Maria, whom she had quietened with an opiate, must have crept down here afterwards in her restless sleep. Ah!" sighed the woman, "I see no more!"

The strange wrapt expression died out of her starry eyes. They became dim and clouded over. The colour faded slowly from her cheeks, and, half-fainting, she sank once more upon the couch.

The voice of Hamish, now clear, cold, and incisive, at last broke the stunned silence.

"And how came *you* to learn this dreadful secret?"

"Christine O'Mara is dead! She died in my arms, confessing her guilt," she answered in sombre tones.

"And who are you? oh, who are you?" Honoria questioned fearfully.

And lo! Honoria's worst anticipations were realised. The woman rose, slowly and proudly, facing them all.

"I am Maria Langworthy!" she said simply.

In the moments that "flew by without a breath," she cast her eyes from one to the other of her auditors, smilingly, questioningly, eagerly, then in doubt and fear, and finally, in an agony of terror and despair.

"Am I then changed beyond recognition?" she wailed. "Will no one acknowledge me? I am Maria Langworthy! Maria, who was lost, degraded, dishonoured, and cast out! Robert!" she cried with strident passion, rising and holding out her hands, "Robert! Dear kind protector and champion! Do you deny me? You knew me, if the others did not, in the well-remembered room upstairs. You knew me, you——"

He only gazed on her sorrowfully, with deep compassion.

"You shall be vindicated!" she cried eagerly. "The world shall know the righteousness of your steadfast faith. It shall learn of my years of misery after the injustice of that dreadful error! To-morrow my name shall be cleared, and I—and I shall——"

"Claim the millions," said Pennifeather, completing the sentence quite pleasantly. "This, I suppose, is Mr Poole's cheerful surprise!"

She brushed the interruption impatiently aside and turned to Sir Hamish Stuart.

"Hamish!" she implored in beseeching tones. "You loved me once! I have gone out of your life, but you cannot have forgotten!"

Sir Hamish, too, remained passive and irresponsible.

Then, rushing to the couch and casting herself down on her knees, she clung, weeping passionately, about the neck of Mrs Proudly.

"Honoria! Honoria!" she sobbed. "You, at least, will be kind to me—you who have borne the secret revealed to me by Christine, you who never breathed, for my sake, that you and Hamish found Harry by the window that night."

"What's this?" exclaimed the Counsellor, astounded, as the eyes of Robert and Hamish met in deep mutual understanding.

"Honoriam!" she sobbed again, "won't you speak? Won't you say that you believe me?"

Poor little Mrs Proudly took the pleading face in her hand, and gently pushed back the escaping tendril-like curls.

"Why should I not believe you, Maria, my dear—if you are Maria?" she responded, returning the caress with timid wistful earnestness; "but why did you tell us all this to-night?"

"Why?" exclaimed the other, drawing back, "why did I tell it? To clear my name and fame from the stigma of fifteen years! Should I have held my peace?"

"But you cannot forget, Maria," returned Mrs Proudly simply, "that we knew it—Hamish and I—we knew it all before!"

"You knew it!" the woman cried incredulously, slowly unclasping the other and gazing at her with dilated eyes.

"Surely you have not forgotten," Honoriam went on, nervously wringing her hands, "how the discovery was made; how Christine's diary was found in a secret place, with the very letter of yours that she had abstracted from the envelope, when she substituted one of her own!"

The woman gazed in stricken wonderment in Mrs Proudly's face and rose slowly to her feet; while the voice of Pennifeather, harsh, metallic, and implacable, rang out its sarcastic message of disbelief.

"The lady has not forgotten these things, Honoriam! Look at her face! She never knew them, never till this day! Neither did I, nor, I am sure, the Lord Advocate!"

She only cast at him a sidelong glance of sinister hostility.

"Tell me more, Honoriam!" she panted; "remind me of all these things. Tell me more!"

"It can't be that you don't recollect," Honoriam continued as before "how your father visited you in prison

and implored you to save Christine; how he showed you the diary and the letter which would have brought home her guilt; how he told you that he had sinned deeply against her though unwittingly, and how her whole nature was warped; how the exposure of Christine's crime would inevitably bring ruin, disgrace, and perhaps death on himself; and how nobly you resolved, for her sake and his, to bear the shame of an open trial!"

"But why? why?" the woman cried again in manifest perplexity, "why did I make this unheard-of sacrifice? What was Christine to me, after all?"

"You ask me what she was to you?" Honoria repeated, "you, who wept tears of joy when the trial was over that she was saved through your noble act, Maria? Your father was her father! Christine is your elder sister!"

"Sister!" she shrieked, stepping back hastily and dashing aside the hair that shaded her glowing eyes, "my sister!"

"You!—you are Christine O'Mara!" Sir Hamish Stuart thundered. "Could you imagine for one moment that this pitiful pretence would deceive *us*?"

"I am Maria Langworthy!" she answered sullenly and mechanically.

"You are Christine O'Mara," repeated Pennifeather in turn, "a self-confessed murderess, in intention if not in deed. For years I have known you as once the companion of the man Merelli, and suspected you as the woman in the train, but never till to-night—blind bat that I was!—did I recognise the disguise in which you masqueraded here. I have followed you patiently through the world, hoping to see this day, and your accomplice James Langworthy will soon be in my grasp as well!"

She waved him impatiently aside.

"Yes, yes, you are right," she mouthed and mumbled almost unintelligibly in broken tones; "I wanted the money. I am Christine. You were bound to know sooner or later, and I should never have lived to enjoy it. What does it all matter now? Maria, my sister!—my little, little sister! Ah, he was cruel,—wicked

though I had become! Why did not he tell me? Could he imagine that I should willingly have harmed a hair of her head? I was prepared to hate her, to sacrifice her, but how soon her goodness won me to protect her from Haviland and—and him! I loved Maria, and had I known this——” and she broke down, still muttering to herself in a crooning monotone.

“How dare you say that you loved Maria?” the Lord Advocate broke in sternly, “when through your diabolical treachery she suffered such cruel wrong?”

“It was a crazy scheme to save her, to shield her from Haviland and make her safe,” she continued in the same far-away manner. “Haviland was one of Us, chained and bound. Some day the insatiable craving that is never satisfied was sure to exert its irresistible force again, and I resolved to bring him to the toils, that never might he dare to lift his eyes to that sweet child in her happiness.”

“Was that why you forged the letters in her name?” inquired the disbelieving Pennifeather sarcastically.

“There was no forgery,” she answered. “‘Min’ was the name by which he called me in the days he had forgotten, and during the hours we spent together on the night of the ball. It is impossible to distinguish my natural handwriting from Maria’s, but, after the recognition the previous Friday, I thought it inconceivable that his mind could once more become a blank, that he would surely remember and understand. I dared not write openly, free from the scrutiny of the other two—they guarded and mistrusted me, as I did them—until their absence in Glasgow gave me my opportunity on the Friday. Then he could not resist!”

“And what,” asked the Lord Advocate more kindly, “was this mystic power, this mysterious force that drew him?”

“I dare not tell,” answered Christine, shuddering violently, the thin line of her white teeth just showing through her scarcely-parted lips. “It is as overwhelming as the tempest, as potent as nature herself, an eternal and insatiate desire for the unattainable, debasing to

man and woman, a deadly fascination the first pangs of which you, Hamish Stuart, almost experienced to-night. Had not Mr Pennifeather destroyed that cup which I had only touched, as you scented the fragrance of the dead leaves in my bosom, you would have succumbed, the first links would have been riveted, you would have been mine, body and soul, following and fawning, desiring, raving, bound in my relentless chains!"

"But why—why?" exclaimed Hamish in dire amazement. "What evil did I ever do to you?"

"I sought to preserve Maria from Haviland because he was a degenerate—a lost soul, even as I am—a lost soul!" she moaned; "and you I desired to punish, because of your infirmity of purpose, because you came not to her help—you preferred to desert her and go your own self-righteous way! Had I but mastered your will a few minutes since, the wife you boast of, whoever she may be, would have seen your face no more, and your base betrayal of Maria in her hour of need would have been avenged!"

"Oh, this is sheer, stark, downright raving lunacy!" exclaimed Mr Proudly.

"Or quite an artistic dramatic performance!" observed the ironical Mr Pennifeather. "Come, Miss O'Mara—if that be the name you affect again—surely you do not desire us to credit this high-strung rhapsodical harangue! To come down to prosaic fact, you acknowledge yourself the woman in the train, and, in the presence of the Lord Advocate, I must ask you to surrender as an accomplice of James Langworthy in the murder of his brother Christopher."

Her laugh was loud and shrill as he advanced towards her.

"Fool!" she shrieked, "James Langworthy you have never seen—you never shall see! And as for me—a thing accursed, dragging a burden such as woman never bore—what is life to me?"

Still facing the advancing man, she sprang to the wall and beat heavily upon the wainscot behind her. In a moment there flashed in her hand a keen-bladed dagger.

"What's that?" cried Pennifeather, starting back aghast.

"Mike's knife!" she hissed at him as, with a side-long glance of maniacal fury and scorn, she made to plunge it deep in her own heart.

"Stop!" thundered the commanding voice of the Lord Advocate. "Is it thus you would repay the sacrifice, the martyrdom, of your sister Maria?"

"She gave up all that a woman holds dear," Horatio Proudly said, with deep emotion, "that your life should be saved!"

The weapon fell from her nerveless fingers and clattered on the floor as, with a dreadful pallor creeping over her mask-like features, she sank to the ground.

"Ah!" she sighed, "it has come at last—I am dying here!"

In a moment Honoria was kneeling by her side and the men were bending over her. Tenderly they laid her on a couch, supporting her with cushions and pillows, while the dear womanly Honoria, her timidity and aversion fallen from her like a garment, gently wiped the blood and gathering foam from the whitening lips.

In a little she opened her eyes and gazed about her.

"It is gone!" she sighed, and a wonderfully sweet smile overspread the pale face. "The evil has gone out of me, and I am at peace—at peace!"

"Oh, Christine!" whispered Honoria tremulously, "pray, my dear—pray for pardon!"

"I will," she answered meekly,—*"I do. But it is all so restful. I feel like poor Blanche of Devan!"* and she murmured dreamily—

*"For, as these ebbing veins decay,
My frenzied visions fade away!"*

The placid face seemed gradually to take on the virginal contour of the face of her sister as she had appeared to Robert and Horatio in the prison cell.

"Robert," she murmured, "say you forgive me all the ill I did! Indeed, indeed, at one time I meant

so well! You can never know—oh, thank your God!—the incitements to evil that have raged within my bosom for years.”

“If I have anything to forgive,” answered Robert brokenly, “God knows I do so, freely and sincerely.”

“Oh, Hamish, infirm of purpose,” she murmured again, “why should I have striven to do you harm? Seek out Maria. Say to her that I always fought against my worse self to shield and save her. May she never know how near, how dreadfully near, she was to sharing my fate—unwittingly becoming a castaway, such as I!”

Hamish bent over the dying woman, whispering words of comfort in her ear.

Again that happy smile lighted up her face.

“That is well,” she said softly—“that is well. And should you ever find him who was my father, though I never knew, tell him that I was glad to go!”

Then, very slowly and quietly, but with deep conviction—

“I have been to blame, and I am better—dead!”

The tired eyelids lay gently upon the tired eyes, and Christine O'Mara fell asleep.

Dr Overbury was in the room, brought by old Arthur Marshall. (In the confusion of the moment no one showed surprise at the presence of this queer old fellow. He waited on Robert night and day like a shadow, and all imagined that his presence there was merely a coincidence.)

“There is nothing for me to do here,” said the doctor, after a brief examination. “Madame Morrell the famous soprano, heart failure—very sad, undoubtedly.”

He must have been a kind-hearted creature, the old clerk; for, as the others left the room for a few moments to make necessary arrangements, he stole back on tiptoe, and, leaning very tenderly over the woman who lay there dead, his face working convulsively, he withdrew the lace handkerchief from the still, beautiful face, and gazed upon it with streaming eyes.

"She was the last—the last!" he murmured. "God keep us all! Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner!"

And then he shuffled silently from the room.

It had all been too much for Mr Counsellor Proudly—the house-warming, the revelation, the tragedy! Seated in the cold drawing-room endeavouring to impart some consolation to the weeping Honoria, who clung to him shudderingly, he seemed scarcely conscious of where he was or what he was doing. But the ruling passion was strong, and words flowed forth in torrents.

"Plain it is to me—hush! hush! Honoria—that that young woman had involved herself—dry your tears with my handkerchief, my love—in a concatenation of circumstances—a sniff of the smelling-salts, sweetheart!—from which it would have been very difficult, nay, wellnigh impossible, for her to have extricated herself. Honoria, you become hysterical; let us retire."

"Undoubtedly!" said Dr Overbury, "undoubtedly!"

CHAPTER III.

MR LANGWORTHY'S REAPPEARANCE.

THE sudden and deplorable end of that Queen of Song, Madame Esther Morrell, in the zenith of her fame, cast a gloom over the musical communities of two hemispheres. True, she had steadfastly refused the most tempting offers to appear in grand opera in London, but hers was a name to conjure with, and the newspapers were full of biographies, critical notices, reminiscences, and recollections, all more remarkable for their appreciation than their consistency or unanimity. At least five different birthplaces and fourteen distinct grandparents were assigned to her. She hailed from New South Wales, from Quebec, from Montana, and the Hebrides. She was of Norman-French extraction, with an infusion of Italian blood and the Celtic temperament, and she had studied in Leipsic, in Paris, in Milan, and in the Academy in London. She had never received any musical training worth mentioning, and had originally been discovered by that eccentric millionaire, the late Mr Christopher Langworthy, singing in the streets of Messina. The public was intensely interested, believed every word of each contradictory report, and then proceeded to forget all about the matter with commendable promptitude.

Meanwhile poor Christine O'Mara had been followed to her grave in the Dean Cemetery by a huge concourse of Edinburgh citizens, and laid to rest hard by the sepulchre of Harry Haviland.

On the same afternoon the Lord Advocate and Charles Pennifeather were seated together in the library of the

great lawyer's house in Moray Place, talking earnestly and at length over the dramatic discoveries of the night of Mr Proudly's dinner-party, and its tragic conclusion.

"The innocence of Maria is, of course, completely established now," said Pennifeather, "though nothing can undo the past; but much remains to be cleared up—the flight of James Langworthy, the death of Parker, the real relationship between Haviland and Christine, and the true nature of that compelling power that dragged him back to her."

"These things we may, perhaps, never know," the Lord Advocate replied, "but is it not enough? Before I abrogate my present position, Heaven be thanked! I can take effectual steps to clear the name of Maria from the aspersions that have been cast upon it, and——"

"A posthumous rehabilitation!" quoth Pennifeather morosely: "there is one whom it will crush to the earth! In spite of all his greatness and honours, I do not envy Sir Hamish Stuart his feelings of confusion and remorse this day."

"Hamish has long ago repented his mistrust," replied the Lord Advocate; "perhaps—who knows?—he may have expiated it. We must not misjudge, Pennifeather, for surely you should be the first now to acknowledge that the most careful logical deductions may be entirely mistaken. At least Hamish has the melancholy pleasure of remembering that Maria understood and forgave. Even in her darkest hour she uttered neither reproach nor blame. A noble woman, Pennifeather, a noble woman!"

And the lonely bachelor sighed heavily as he gazed into the fire, in melancholy retrospection.

"It is a strange confession for a public prosecutor, who will soon be a Judge, to make," he went on meditatively, "but I thank God that Hamish and Honoria Proudly thought it their duty to obey the dying boy's command. Had the whole truth as to what they saw and heard that night been disclosed in the witness-box, nothing could have saved Maria. Her young life must have fallen a sacrifice. A lesson in intellectual humility, is it not?" he added, with a whimsical glance at the

other: "kind hearts are more than coronets, and often better guides than the acutest mind!"

Pennifeather smiled slightly at the implied reflection.

"Poor Maria!" he mused; "I wonder whether, after all, she is alive to-day! What became of her? Whither has she wandered? Will she ever know?"

Yes, she would know, she did know, she was alive, a happy wife and mother, and she had wandered back to the city of her suffering and shame.

"Sir Hamish and Lady Stuart!" a smiling servant announced at the door; and, leading by the hand a boy of six years, with short golden curls and great grey eyes, who bore the name of Robert Montgomery Stuart, she stood before them, with Hamish her husband—a little older, it may be, a little sad, for she had heard the story of Christine—but still the same, the sweet girl grown to a gracious woman, "whose image," as he has already confessed, "had never been effaced from the memory" of Robert Montgomery; the same wistful, earnest look, the still pliant, youthful figure—yes! there she stood, holding out her arms to him in trustful gratitude and affection.

He embraced her with fervour; while Pennifeather shook Hamish by the hand, and actually slapped him on the back, with unwonted and by no means characteristic enthusiasm and unalloyed delight.

"Robert!" she cried, drying her joyful tears, "I am so happy! so happy to see your dear kind face again! You knew of course that Hamish and I——?"

"I have known it from the first," responded Robert bravely, "and thanked God for the knowledge. There! there! Bless you, it was I who sent him to you!"

"Repentant and ashamed!" said Hamish, with feeling.

"And so I owe everything—even a husband, to you!" she exclaimed, half-laughing, half-crying.

"He always was a pattern of unselfish devotion," explained Pennifeather.

"My nightly prayer," said Robert, "has been to be allowed to see this day, when you can look the whole world in the face, as if the past, with all its grief and misery, had never been."

Once more she gave him her hands.

Then, for the first time, she had eyes for his companion.

"Mr Pennifeather?" she cried. "Ah! how glad I am! You also were a true friend: but rather a suspicious one, I am afraid," with a faint reminiscence of her old roguish twinkle. "And this young man is your godson, Robert," she continued, as the Lord Advocate raised the wondering child in his arms and kissed him."

"Run away now, Bobbie dear," she whispered, "nurse is waiting."

The boy obediently left the room, after gravely saluting them all; but in a moment he was back again, dragging by the hand old Arthur Marshall, the Lord Advocate's clerk, who shuffled in apologetically, and then, gently disengaging himself from the small detaining grasp, made to retire. A word from the Lord Advocate restrained him.

"One moment, Marshall! Stay!" he cried. "I want to introduce you for the first time to one for whom you did yeoman service in days gone by."

The old man, clasping once more the hand of the little child, crept haltingly forward. Maria regarded him with a certain puzzled interest, when there dawned slowly on her recollection the figure of the shabby old person that she had noticed once or twice at the table of the court. Then her brows contracted, and a new light began to gleam in these expressive eyes, as the young boy continued to draw his new-found friend towards her.

"He knows my name, mother," shouted Bobbie eagerly. "He called me Robert—none of these Bobbies or Bobs!—and he kissed me!"

Still the old man hung back with strange reluctance, gently patting the child and smiling down upon him.

"To the anxious and unwearied exertions of Arthur Marshall you owe much, Maria," the Lord Advocate continued, "to his untiring resourcefulness, his never-failing patience and skill! I think, perhaps, that he deserves a word of thanks."

The queer lines about the worn face puckered into deeper wrinkles, the lips trembled, and two great tears coursed down the cheeks under the rims of the darkened spectacles, as she clasped the hand that he advanced half shrinkingly.

"I am pleased to be introduced to you, for the first time," she said in wavering accents, her eyes intently searching his face.

He murmured some unintelligible reply.

"Your name is Arthur Marshall?" she questioned, gazing at him still more intently, her bosom beginning to heave, and her breath coming and going in urgent agitation.

"It is!" the husky voice returned, grown more husky than ever, from some restrained emotion.

"Are you sure it is for the first time we meet, and was that always your name?" the thrilling, glad, triumphant voice rang out, as her hands glided gently up to the bowed shoulders—"oh! was that always your name, my dear, my dear?"

The disfiguring glasses were plucked from his eyes, the bushy eyebrows were gone, the figure straightened out and stood erect, and with a rapturous cry of joyful recognition she clasped her fair arms around her father's neck.

"You may have deceived Robert!" she sobbed exultantly, throwing back her head with the old joyous gesture, gazing in his eyes and hiding her face in his bosom once more, "for all these years, dear heart, you have lived like this, for me. I know—I know! But did you think for a moment you could deceive me? What have my sufferings been compared to yours? Joy came to me in the morning; but with you it has been one long night, father, oh, my father!"

She hung about him in transports, fondling him as she used to do, stroking his hands, his hair, grown so sorrowfully thin and grey, and his furrowed, tear-stained cheeks, while Hamish gently led the wide-eyed child from the room.

A great light burst upon Pennifeather and Robert, as well it might.

"I cannot understand it! I cannot believe it!" Robert exclaimed. "Marshall! Langworthy! You—you?"

"In the presence and at the mercy of the Lord Advocate," the newly-found man confessed, in his natural voice. "I know that I should not have revealed myself even now, nor did I intend to do so; but the temptation was strong," and he turned fondly to his daughter again.

"Pshaw! It matters not who your are, or what you have done!" the Lord Advocate answered in ringing tones. "Surely these fifteen years of penury and patient toil have redeemed it all!"

At this point Pennifeather seized the opportunity to commit perhaps the biggest blunder of all his well-meant but blundering career.

"I think it right to warn you, Lady Stuart," he said icily, "of the true reason for this gentleman's long concealment. He is not your father!"

She regarded him with smiling protest.

"His name is James Langworthy, *alias* Antonio Merelli, *alias* Allen Aylesbury, reasonably suspected of various crimes and offences, including in that number the murder of your father, his twin-brother, Christopher Langworthy!"

Langworthy drew his daughter to his side, and turned upon his accuser savagely.

"Be silent, you meddler!" he protested angrily. "More than any other, you are responsible for all the wretchedness of the past. Had it not been for your self-imposed, ultroneous interference, neither Maria nor I should have suffered the agonies we have endured, and, it may be, that three lives would have been spared!"

"I know you for a man of many wiles and subterfuges," replied Pennifeather disdainfully, "but I am not to be deterred from my duty by your theatrical accusations, Mr James Langworthy!"

"I am not James Langworthy!" retorted the other hotly. "There is no James Langworthy! There never was! He is not my brother. I have no brother; I am

the only son of my father, though hardly a credit to his name!"

Whatever Pennifeather was, he was at least a strategist. In a moment he grasped the possibility, nay the probability, that the man was speaking the truth; and, in that light, he began immediately to readjust his whole theory of events. In a flash the significant words of the Lord Advocate recurred to him, "Kind hearts are often better guides than the acutest minds." He drew back as if he had received a blow, and, for the first time in history, the eyeglass fell from his eye and splintered in a hundred fragments on the floor.

"But, father," said Maria, puckering her brows in perplexity, "you forget that I saw Uncle James myself. You introduced me to him in London, don't you remember?"

"You thought you saw him, my dear! As matter of fact, you saw only me go out by one door and in by another. You never saw the two together. It was a simple trick, undertaken for a perfectly laudable purpose, though it led to grievous results in the end."

From his hastily adjusted point of view Pennifeather did some quick thinking.

"But you had a confederate of some kind in the next room," he said.

Langworthy nodded carelessly.

"And the 'laudable purpose' was, I presume, to have an independent and unimpeachable witness?"

"Forgive me, Pennifeather, for that outburst of impatience," Langworthy returned apologetically. "I have been longing for years to shout it aloud, and really to be allowed the use of my own voice again is such a treat that I am hardly responsible!"

"It seems to me," said Sir Hamish, who had returned to the room, and was listening to all this with a gravity and intentness equal to that of Robert himself, "that this allusive and elliptical manner of dealing with the subject will not advance matters. You really owe it to Maria, and all of us, once for all to——"

"Explain the Langworthy mystery?" the other inquired. "I do. And now that poor Christine and Parker—as you knew him—are both gone, and no one can be injured by the confession but myself, there is need for silence no longer. May I sit down?"

Silently and expectantly they all gathered round him, as, with a touch of the old flamboyant air, he thus began.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CONFESSION OF AN HONEST ROGUE.

"My name is not Langworthy. I have had occasion to change it once or twice during my life; but I come of good Scottish stock, and I apprehend that, according to the convenient law of my native land, a man may call himself by any name he pleases, without tiresome and inquisitorial formalities. Is that not so?" he paused to ask, with a whimsical side glance at the Lord Advocate.

"Like Shylock, I'll not answer that," returned the other good-humouredly; "but doubtless you have picked up that dangerous thing, a little knowledge, in all these years."

He smiled deprecatingly and proceeded—

"In spite of all you imagined, Mr Pennifeather, and may still imagine, I was an only child, my father being the owner of an entailed estate, or rather, to speak by the card, the heir-of-entail in possession. The spoiled darling of my mother, I am afraid I was an idle young dog, and a thorn in my father's side. At Oxford I ran up debts, on the turf and elsewhere, to an unconscionable extent. If I had not been cheated," he went on with a reminiscent frown, "if men had played fair and paid up, I should have been all right; but I was taken advantage of, and dishonourably imposed upon. I never could endure such treatment without the desire to get even somehow, and it rankled.

'My father was furious. Mr Poole advised us both that the only way to make things square was for me to consent to the disentail of the property on my father's terms. In the good old-fashioned Scottish way, he

acted for both parties, and, in exchange for my consent to the disentail, and in ignorance of my lawful rights, I received nothing but the payment of my debts. I learned afterwards that I should, if separately advised, have probably been entitled to something like ten thousand pounds as well. Again I had been tricked, cheated, and defrauded, and again it rankled."

The memory of these wrongs, true or false, seemed very real to him indeed, and his eye lighted up angrily as he dwelt on them.

"I left home, a wanderer," he continued, "and soon met poor Christine's mother—yes, my child, as I confided to you in that despairing hour, Christine was your unhappy sister," and he gently patted the hand he held in his. "I married her, and we lived together for a few months. I am not very proud of my conduct then; but, if she grew as tired of me as I did of her, I am sorry for her! We were both young and masterful, cursed with the artistic temperament, and hearts undisciplined and unsubdued, and so we parted. From time to time I sent money for her support and that of the child to a man who afterwards became manager of a London insurance company (you know the man I mean, Pennifeather). He appropriated that money, my wife died, and the child was lost sight of. I did not find out till long afterwards that Christine was not receiving the sums I sent for her. Once more I had been cheated, and once more it rankled!

"After that, I met your mother, dear. She was an angel—a suffering angel, it is true, but, thank God! through no fault of mine. I was at that time a humble hanger-on in Government House in one of our Colonies. She was the Governor's daughter, and we fell in love and ran off together. She was never forgiven—most parents are hard-hearted scoundrels!—and so she drooped, a wilted flower, dying when you were born.

"I had obtained employment in a mercantile house in another colony, no matter where; and it was then that I made my great discovery. Among my many useless pursuits—the accursed artistic temperament again!—I took to dabbling in chemistry; and one day, almost by accident, I hit upon a substance, or rather a com-

bination of substances, that proved, on experiment, to be of enormous commercial value. No need to mention its name. It is now a household word, and the processes in which it is employed as an essential ingredient are covered to-day by a hundred patents. Dye-works, bottle-works, potteries, calico printers, paint-works, all sorts of manufactures require it daily. It revolutionised countless trades, it simplified and cheapened production everywhere, it brought ruin to old-established conservative houses, and prosperity to many concerns that had been struggling on the verge of bankruptcy.

"I hurried home with you, my dear, my fortune made; placed you at school and in the family of Mr Poole, who at that time had no idea that I was the heir-of-entail whom he had assisted in swindling out of his legal rights, and returned to complete my experiments.

"And I did complete them with a vengeance! In an evil and disastrous hour I succeeded in extracting, from the substance of my discovery, its active principle—a spirit, an essence, a seed containing all the possibilities of good, and all the incitements to evil in the world. Poor Haviland wrote of it afterwards as the potion of Circe, and well he might! It was that, and contained many other horrible potentialities as well. Should it ever be brought to light again—for sure am I that its secret will die with me!—it may be that, in the hands of skilful and enlightened physicians and philanthropists, and directed into proper channels, it will be for the healing of humanity. Its cabalistic name, among the very few that had learned its existence and properties, was 'anaconda,' for it is dangerous and insidious as any snake, gradually stifling and enfolding its fascinated willing victims, till it crushes out of them strength of will, integrity, truthfulness, goodness, and life itself."

The Lord Advocate inclined his head gravely, as there flashed across his recollection the scene when Christine O'Mara had struck sudden terror to the heart of the speaker by the unexpected mention of the word.

"The thing came about in the simplest way," Mr Langworthy went on. "I happened to drop some of

it on the floor, and my little dog, a fox terrier, eagerly lapped a few drops. The effect was amazing. He was an excellent fox terrier, a good ratter. But, from the moment that he swallowed that infernal stuff, he was a dog with a power of scent twice as keen, an eye twice as bright, and an agility and general knowingness that he never possessed before. No longer could he be described as a good ratter: he was a slayer of rats, killing his thousands with the jawbone of a dog. I gave him some more, and he slept peacefully for four-and-twenty hours, waking quite normal, but heavy and rather dazed. I increased the doze, and the dog died.

"Here, within my grasp, was a new power of infinite possibilities! Recklessly and madly, I resolved to experiment upon myself. I injected a very weak solution into my arm; and, instantaneously, the effect was like the effect upon the dog. I could do twice the work in half the time. My brain was clearer, my hand firmer, my outlook more hopeful and confident, my abilities in every direction sublimated to the acme of their capacity. Above all, there was a kind of reposeful exhilaration which turned pain to pleasure, work to play, and intellectual exertion to perennial delight. For instance, before the discovery of this devil mixture, I could play the fiddle, as I could do most things, in a haphazard, amateurish fashion. With the help of its influence I practised and memorised without difficulty or fatigue, and with a celerity and exactitude hitherto unknown, enabling me in a month or two to perform wonders as astonishing to the musical world as to myself.

"Yes, Pennifeather," he broke off suddenly, "I see you are thinking of Merelli: and you are quite right."

"Please continue!" replied Pennifeather shortly. He had been listening in silence, with an absolutely expressionless countenance.

"My indulgence, however," the narrator went on, "slight as it then was, produced in me a constant restlessness, and desire for change and excitement. By this time I had acquired large interests in many concerns, both at home and abroad, and the period was approaching when I had promised to visit Maria once more.

Accordingly I started manfully, without any provision of the drug, but the craving became so intolerable that I was forced to return. This should have been a warning, indeed; but those who have never been dominated by that overpowering spell cannot judge fairly or impartially. 'He jests at scars who never felt a wound.'

"Home I came, and hastened to Edinburgh. Everywhere my affairs were in order, and, being calmed and tranquillised to a great extent, I resolved to settle down in my late father's county, and live during the rest of the year here in a town house when Maria should be old enough to bear me company.

"Meantime my mind reverted to Christine; but I could find no trace either of her or the defaulting trustee. By dint of diligent inquiry, I at last tracked her to a town in the Midlands, where she was acting as a member of a travelling dramatic company under the management of a fine-looking, dare-devil fellow, as clever as he was unscrupulous. To my chagrin I discovered that Christine was this man's wife, much more devoted to him at that time than he to her, although afterwards it was a very different story. I was willing and anxious to do all I could for this new-found daughter, but by no means desirous that my money should be squandered on her dissolute husband, who seemed to care very little about her; so, being still comparatively young, with no ties except Maria, keen on adventure and distraction, I became a member of the company myself, principally with the object of keeping a fatherly eye on Christine. They were all poor enough sticks. Christine could sing a little and play the piano in a patient, mechanical way. She was a good girl in those days, generous-minded and placid, as she always was till she discovered the secret of my fatal habit, and she seemed to appreciate the interest I took in her, although I never revealed the fact of our relationship. I confess that the life grew irksome to me after a time; and I therefore suggested that we three should leave the company and embark together in a new business which I proposed to start.

"Yes, Montgomery," he branched off again, "I see

that you recollect. That letter that was read out by Maria was from a member of the theatrical company. It was by no means the first, and she always was a professional beggar. No one was defrauded of anything; and, but for Maria's intervention, I should not have sent her a penny."

Maria pressed the hand that held hers, reassuringly.

"You always were the soul of generosity!" she whispered.

"What this proposed business was," the speaker resumed, "I shall say directly. Meanwhile there occurred an incident of terrible significance which I had carelessly omitted to guard against. We all lived together in rooms while I was maturing and gradually unfolding my plans; and, in moments of relaxation, Christine and I used to play the piano and violin together. One day, to my astonishment, she seemed a new woman, commanding her instrument with a verve, fire, and power that she had never before exhibited. She had found her musical soul, and she had also developed a voice which afterwards brought the world to her feet. Need I reveal the cause? She had discovered the accursed 'anaconda,' and had fallen a victim to it. From that day she was doomed. That is the unforgivable sin of my life, which never can be expiated or washed away in floods of tears. One single, thoughtless, momentary indiscretion—the careless forgetfulness to lock a drawer in my desk—has brought in its train all the calamities which ensued, the punishment for which I shall endure to my dying day!"

"Courage, father, courage!" murmured Maria, "there is hope and pardon for us all!"

"I need scarcely remind you of the result," he resumed, mastering his emotion with a struggle. "The Merelli concerts were the rage of London. I noticed with dismay, however, that the effects of the drug on Christine, doled out to her in infinitesimal proportions for each public performance, differed from my own symptoms. Not only was she at her best in everything she undertook—amongst other things, drawing her husband back to her side, and inspiring him with

a doglike devotion—but she developed a cunning, a craftiness, and a capacity for deception and downright wickedness altogether foreign to her real nature. On a sudden impulse, especially when frightened or enraged, she would stick at nothing.”

“Not even at trying to stab with a poisoned dagger!” Pennifeather suggested reminiscently.

“You are quite right!” Mr Langworthy agreed sadly. “Christine was the pseudo-Mike; though I must confess, Pennifeather, that perhaps, unintentionally, you had aggravated her almost beyond endurance.”

Pennifeather fumbled for the eyeglass that was not there, in obviously uncomprehending surprise.

“I shall tell you the reason directly,” said Mr Langworthy. “But now for the real business to which we three turned our attention. You may remember the various little pin-pricks from which I had suffered in my youth, cheating and chicanery, fraudulent trickery of a kind which the law is too dignified or too indolent to consider. Here was opened a field for a new form of disinterested philanthropy, combining all the excitement of the life of a crook with the self-satisfaction of the benefactor of mankind! I resolved to become the unofficial righter of the wrongs of those who are deprived of legal restitution: I was to be the defrauder of the fraudulent, the swindler of the swindlers, the protector of innocent sufferers whom the law refuses to avenge. Consult your digests of the laws of England and Scotland under the heading ‘Unlawful Obligations,’ and you will have an inkling of my meaning. Did a man gamble in differences on the Stock Exchange and refuse to pay his broker, payment was to be obtained somehow by me. Did a welsher bilk the backers, he was to be made to suffer. Did an insurance company take advantage of some quirk or quibble in the policy, did a public-house customer plead the Tippling Act or a gamester the Betting and Gaming Acts, or was any dirty trick resorted to by which a man evaded responsibilities unenforceable by law, I was to make him pay through the nose. Above all, if a man refused to make provision for the woman he had wronged, I was prepared

to take it out of him somehow, to the uttermost farthing."

"A bold adventure," said the Lord Advocate, not altogether approvingly, "but, I should say, difficult to carry to a successful issue."

"What can money not accomplish?" returned the other. "I pondered the matter deeply for months, and, as a beginning, I started the Merelli gaming-house, where I first encountered our arch-enemy, Mr Pennifeather," and he bowed to him, rather mockingly. "But, more to the point, I was able to make the acquaintance of all the international plungers, punters, bookmakers large and small, and professional scoundrels of this country and the Continent."

"That adventure came to an abrupt conclusion, as I remember," said Pennifeather sourly.

"But, thanks to your invaluable invention of exits and entrances," retorted Mr Langworthy, with another bow, "without any disastrous results, and not before it had accomplished its purpose. Then began the golden age for gamblers. I capitalised almost my entire fortune, withdrawing my money from most of the companies that were raking in profits from my discovery, and began business in earnest,—and a glorious game that business was! Its ramifications and possibilities were endless. Hundreds of times did we break the law that justice might be done. No fraudulent trustee or sanctimonious solicitor who devoured widows' houses slept comfortably in his bed, once we got on his track. It was indeed a noble sport, and, needless to say, we enjoyed it. We formed ourselves, also, into a great wagering clearing-house. Through numerous and intricate channels, I was able to establish a complete control over the gambling community, at home and abroad. No backer was ever diddled out of his winnings once we got our claws on the creature who refused to disgorge; and, on the other hand, the professional layers of odds were enabled to carry on their business in perfect security, because I guaranteed their losses, taking my chance of recovering from the defaulter by my own methods, and not by process of law."

"Gad!" said Pennifeather, slapping his leg, "I begin to see daylight."

"Of course you do," the other returned, now thoroughly enjoying himself: "take your own case! You cannot but know that we did not like you, not that we minded you much; but our rightful restitutions had, now and then, necessitated dealings with banks and other public offices about which you seemed to us unduly officious and interfering. It was, therefore, almost too good to be true when we were informed—falsely, as it now turns out—that you had not paid a bookmaker a bet of five thousand pounds—(even bookmakers, alas! are not always trustworthy)—and so I managed, very simply, to mulct you in that sum. The Raeburns I showed you were copies made by me when a young man living with my father. Christine was the little man who presented the bogus cheque—her hair under the wig always did give her a hydrocephalous appearance—and her husband was the *soi-disant* Herbert Grayson. The subsequent theft of the genuine pictures was a pure coincidence; but I managed to track the thieves and screw out of them the whole price they had netted. Deducting £9500 for myself, as the price of my consent to the disentail of my late father's estate, I sent the balance to Mr Poole for the benefit of the creditors on Glenvorlich,—I made it up to him afterwards, for he is a decent old bird and behaved well about Maria. Your own £5000 I returned to you after recovering it from the bookmaker by a grossly illegal process which I need not dilate upon."

"Now tell us about 'Uncle James,'" said Maria.

By this time the sympathies of all the auditors were obviously won over to the honest rogue; and they drew nearer together, as he proceeded to unfold the rest of his story.

CHAPTER V.

THE INCUBUS OF BROTHER JAMES.

"THE invention of Brother James," Mr Langworthy observed, frowning gloomingly, and with a half-vexed laugh, "was the rock upon which we ultimately split. It played havoc with the whole scheme in the end, and yet it seemed such a simple and comparatively innocent little deception. It arose in this way. The man I wanted to get at was the insurance manager who had pocketed my hard-gotten earnings instead of spending them on Christine. Accordingly, I created my fictitious brother James, and lent myself ten thousand pounds, which I banked in James's name. It was not my intention that that money should be withdrawn by means of a forged cheque; but Christine was in one of her most impish moods, and almost gave the whole show away by impersonating the little man again, and being nearly caught by Pennifeather."

"That accounts for her dislike of me," exclaimed Pennifeather.

"To a certain extent it does," replied the narrator, "but you shall hear. In the middle of the scheme you came to London, my dear Maria; and I succeeded in hoodwinking you into the belief that there were two of us. It was quite simply done, by a quick change of coats, and carrying on snatches of conversation with Parker in the inner room. You were completely deceived."

"I was quite positive," Maria acquiesced, "that I saw you both."

"Think it over, and you will find that you were

wrong. The rest of the trick was a little gruesome and bizarre. In a long collapsible box we had a dead man, and amongst my traps was an empty Gladstone bag. These were both shoved below the seat by confederates. Christine's husband and I, much muffled up, were to enter together, and he was simply to leave the train at the first station with Christine. As we passed Golanthy Quarry, I was to have heaved the body, whose face was smashed so as to be unrecognisable, right into it, and then to have slept till our arrival in Edinburgh. A hue and cry would be raised, and, after a decent interval, we should have seen to it that the remains of brother James was fished out. The way would then be clear for me to claim the insurance money.

"But things went wrong from the start. It was an ill-omened and rather clumsy endeavour, which required very careful handling indeed to achieve success. Christine's husband, the man you knew as Parker, had been driven distracted by his wife's behaviour. She had disappeared at intervals for about a fortnight, and tauntingly refused to give any explanation. Of course we understand now what had happened!"

Pennifeather nodded.

"She had met Haviland!" he said.

"I am afraid so," the other returned sadly. "Indeed, I am sure of it. It was then that his initiation into the mysteries of the 'anaconda' took place, with the curious temperamental result in his case that, until he was once more under its influence, his mind became an absolute blank in regard to all that had happened during previous indulgence."

"How terrible!" cried Maria.

"How devilish!" her husband muttered.

"Shall I go on?" asked Mr Langworthy.

The Lord Advocate signed to him to proceed.

"Parker was not quite master of himself, and had obviously been drinking. His first mistake was to engage a compartment in a corridor carriage. I succeeded in getting him along the platform to the train, but, after the tickets had been examined, there was nothing for it but to have him smuggled away again,

as I could not trust him to fend for himself at the next station had the original programme been carried out. Christine, also, was rather perverse and determined on remaining; and, to crown all, a young man, whom I had never seen before, insisted on joining us from the corridor door. To my amazement, I saw that he was obviously under the influence of my drug. Where he had got it I could not imagine, though now we know. He was very talkative and exceedingly amusing, delighted to hear me address Christine as 'Min'—her true name, by the way, being Marian.

"'Why,' said he, 'I know another Min, in Edinburgh, the darling of my heart, and she is your living image!'

"Imagine my dismay when I discovered that this devotee was obviously referring to my own daughter, Maria!

"By the time I got him out of the compartment we were long past the chosen spot. I opened the case hurriedly with a screw-driver—cutting my hand in the process, and afterwards pitching the tool out of the window—packed the collapsible box in the Gladstone bag, seized the corpse in my arms, and was just about to take my chance by hurling it over an embankment when the blind flew up, Haviland, almost sobered, looked in, and the railway smash occurred.

"Next day the officious ass Parker told to the papers the apocryphal story of my dear deceased brother. Maria, too, was aware of his existence, as she thought; and the question came to be, How were we to act?

"I had really received little harm, for I was protected from the crashing timber by the poor dead body in my arms. Christine, too, escaped without a scratch. Of course she was no fool. She knew that she should not have been in the train at all; so, after seeing me comfortably conveyed to a hospital, very wisely she slipped back to London. She told who I was, and telegraphed Maria. She swore that she said nothing of the twin-brother; but somehow the story appeared in the Scotch papers. We were thus in this dilemma. We did not know whether the young man, who turned out to be Haviland, was alive or dead. If alive, he would cer-

tainly turn up, sooner or later, at Queen Anne Square; and, if he was in a condition to remember any of the events of that night, he would recognise us both, and know that there was no second man in the compartment originally. So it was agreed that Christine should go in disguise to Edinburgh to reconnoitre, and, at the same time, the cunning workmen who had contrived the secrets of the Merelli house were bribed to do similar work in the house in Queen Anne Square. Christine's husband, now contrite and ashamed, was to come as Parker—he was, of course, a born actor—and we should see how things would eventuate.

“But imagine Christine's disgust when she discovered that the detested Pennifeather was an habitual visitor to the music-room! It was our intention to drop the whole affair of the James Langworthy episode, and it would have died a natural death but for his officious interference. Of course he discovered at once that the Merelli contrivances and his own invented door or a modification had been fitted in the music-room, and all the books necessary for the control of our business were concealed within the false wall. Christine grew more venomous and furious every day.

“But consider my position, helpless with these two constantly at my side—one or other in attendance night and day,—not that I was quite so helpless as they imagined,” he added, with a twinkle, “but that was my affair! I was afraid, desperately afraid! Christine was in possession of the drug, which I could not do without. At any time she might give me a double dose and get me to sign away my fortune, or quieten me for ever without leaving a trace. Parker, too, by this time had taken to the vile habit. I bargained with them that, if we got successfully out of this hole, we should share alike in my fortune, and that I should never draw a cheque unless initialled by them both.”

“I also begin to see the meaning of it all,” said the Lord Advocate.

“By means of my conversations with you, Robert and Hamish, I let them clearly understand that, while they

could not compel me to disinherit Maria, I should not provide her with a dowry during my lifetime, and as Christine did not know that she was herself my child, she was unaware of her own legal claim. But it was to you, my dear child, that I owed the easing of the situation, because Christine, perverse and unruly as she had become, actually fell in love with you. In her better moments she was heart and soul devoted to you, and shuddered at the thought of a union between you and Haviland, who had partaken of the forbidden fruit."

"And so every one, as usual, was scheming for my happiness!" exclaimed Maria, with shining eyes.

"And that," said Hamish, "accounts for Christine's desire that a prosaic and thoroughly commonplace person like myself should wed Maria!"

"In her own natural self," answered her father, "Christine was kind and gentle and sincere. For Maria's sake she dreaded the influence of Haviland, and even of me; and such is the suspicion that knowledge breeds, I was in turn mortally anxious to remove Maria from the influence of her sister.

"Then came the time when I discovered that Christine had forged the cheque on Rigby's Bank, and got my ten thousand pounds. This was, of course, a breach of our compact, and so one night, when they both thought me comfortably disposed of, I succeeded in stealing it back, all but five hundred pounds, which Christine had spent when she took the precaution to change the original notes. This £9500 I handed secretly——"

"To me!" said Robert, smiling.

"And right well did you fulfil your trust! although you nearly upset everything by your dogged fidelity at a moment when I needed ready money, lots of it, and dared not draw a cheque.

"Christine said never a word, though both my room and I were searched with great thoroughness, I assure you. Then she made up her mind"—here he laughed heartily—"that Mr Pennifeather had taken it! It was hidden in one of the secret places in the music-room, and you did pry and peer, you know!"

"It appears to me," said Pennifeather, "that I was never in the good graces of Miss Christine at any time!"

"I never knew a man in greater danger," the other replied seriously, "or one more obstinately persistent. Up to this time I knew from Christine's reports that you were sticking like a leech to the notion that I was my own brother James; and, as a last resort, I made up my mind to frighten you off. Hence my unexpected appearance in the music-room, my practical disclosure that I was Merelli, and my ineffectual warnings.

"About this time also there occurred the punishment of the Secretary of the Midlothian for refusal to pay his differences. We worked the thing quite simply between the three of us, Parker being Earnest Willis. It was perhaps rather risky, but we suffered from ennui, Christine's mischievous desire further to bewilder and confuse Mr Pennifeather overcame my scruples, and justice had to be done. The brokers got their money all right, and the Secretary had to pay.

"And now, Mr Pennifeather," he continued, "I have not spoken so long for many years. I believe that you yourself could complete the story from all that you have learned to-night."

"I believe I could," Pennifeather assented.

"Proceed, then!" said Mr Langworthy, "and I shall correct any mistake."

CHAPTER VI.

MR PENNIFEATHER DEFENDS HIS ERRORS AND REMAINS
A CONVINCED UNBELIEVER.

"I do not desire," said Pennifeather meditatively, "to explain the evident, illustrate the obvious, or dilate upon the commonplace——"

"That being the lawyer's function," the Lord Advocate interpolated, smiling.

"But I am free to maintain that, but for two fundamental errors, my deductions were sound in the main."

"Quite sound, all sound, nothing but sound!" Sir Hamish remarked mischievously.

"I maintain," continued Pennifeather obstinately, "that any sane man would have believed in the existence of James Langworthy, after hearing the story told by Lady Stuart that day in the music-room."

"But a logician, like an author, should verify his references," said Maria demurely.

"My next error," Pennifeather resumed, "was absolutely inexcusable. Quite correctly I deduced the presence of the woman in the train in the Queen Anne Square house on the fatal night: I was convinced that she was the woman who played and sang at Merelli's: I knew you to be Merelli, sir,—Christine O'Mara played the piano with you in the music-room, Christine O'Mara professed to be unable to sing, although her speaking voice betrayed her, and I actually saw Christine O'Mara in the house on the night of Haviland's death. The thing was so obvious that a mole should have seen it, and yet I failed to appreciate a fact staring me in the face!"

"For my part, I always thought her disguise too

good," said Mr Langworthy: "the black hair bunched over her natural curls suggested a wig, and her trick of tossing her head would have given her away to me, I am certain. But come! Having confessed your errors, can you reconstruct the drama?"

"You did not; of course; hear the confession of Christine on the night she died," Pennifeather began.

"Pardon me," replied the other, "I did—(Proudly must really have that house overhauled)—and I believe it to be substantially accurate."

"So do I," said Pennifeather, "and that being so, little remains to be explained, now that we know the secret of the 'anaconda.' I deduced a drug, you remember. Harry was certainly under its influence on the night of the ball. Christine had somehow managed to instil some into his veins just before he congratulated the happy couple."

"You are right," said Langworthy, "it was in the champagne."

"Then she went to him in the music-room, after the rest had departed for the ball, and flew up in the lift at the unexpected return of Maria at midnight. Harry was probably hidden somewhere in the room. Maria—I beg your pardon, Lady Stuart—heard Christine sobbing in her room where her husband had discovered her. His was the gruff voice that Lady Stuart heard. Of course he escaped in the lift to their secret room on the ground-floor. Christine resumed her dark hair and opened the door. After Lady Stuart left, she returned to the music-room, where she stayed with Harry for these two hours. Am I right?"

Mr Langworthy assented gravely.

"The true history of the letters, and of Harry's return on the Sunday night, we know," Pennifeather went on. "In her horror at Haviland's despairing draught of the poisoned waters, Christine forgot all about the letters; thereafter, Lady Stuart, overcome by the opiate that Christine had administered, wandered down to the music-room."

"Let us hope," said Sir Hamish meaningly, "that that is true!"

"It is, it must be!" cried Maria vehemently. "I can-

not think that she would, even in her worst moments, have carried me there!"

"Never!" said Mr Langworthy. "She confessed everything to me, and implored me to save her and Maria. Responsible as I thought myself for the perversion of her mind, I felt that I could not sacrifice her without an appeal to Maria. I therefore visited Maria in prison, told her that Christine was her sister, explained that through my own folly and sin she was not wholly responsible, and left it to her to choose whether she would not try to save her and me, as the case against herself must break down. Like the noble woman that she is, she did not hesitate for one moment!"

Here he raised the little hand he held in his, and kissed it fondly.

"Then," he resumed, "I stole all Christine's store of the drug, driving her to a despair of desire. Parker also grew almost mad with terror when deprived of it; but he must still have had some concealed about him—such a practice makes its devotees cunning and selfish. When things began to look black on the first day of the trial, I terrified them with Pennifeather's discovery of the screw-driver, sent the bogus confession to Pennifeather, and to each of the two of them a cheque for £100,000 to clear out, with an intimation of the place in London where a store of the devil's mixture was to be found. Christine fled the same evening. She could not resist that temptation."

"And how did Parker die?" the Lord Advocate inquired.

"I would fain believe and hope," answered Langworthy, "that in the hurry and secrecy of the lift, when intending to join Christine, he unintentionally gave himself a fatal dose, all that he had, hypodermically."

"That, at least," said Sir Hamish, "is the most charitable explanation."

"And so it all comes to this," the Lord Advocate mused, "that the whole defence that we were so proud of, poor Proudly and I, was no less wildly wrong, in fact and theory, than the case for the prosecution—a striking example, indeed, of the limitations of human reasoning and understanding!"

"But none the less worthy of my lifelong gratitude and love," said Maria, with an earnest light glowing in her thoughtful eyes.

"Since that unhappy hour," Mr Langworthy resumed, "I have endeavoured to live a life of expiation. 'The Wagering Club Insurance Company,' as we had called ourselves, was dissolved, and all the branches and officials paid off. The books written in cipher with corrosive ink now lie mouldering, along with my old typewriter, behind the false wall of the music-room. Pennifeather found in the fireplaces the ashes of the papers that I had burned there. None knew for certain who the chief of that philanthropic institution was. The rest of my riches I have allowed to accumulate in the hope that, some day, Maria and her children might inherit them. So long as Christine lived, I dared not communicate with her—she was well provided for—nor with Maria. My daily dread was lest they should meet again. To the last Christine must have taken the drug. Nothing but its influence, and the influence of her surroundings on the 19th of June, could have dragged that confession from her, or induced her to believe that her pitiful personation of Maria would be successful. Poor, poor Christine—Marian, my beloved Min!" and he beat his breast with his clenched hands, while tears of sorrow rolled down his furrowed cheeks.

"The physical agonies I endured for years," he continued, shuddering as he spoke, "no words can picture, no mind can conceive! The craving of every cell of my being for that deceitful stimulus, the shrieking agony of every tortured nerve! Oh, my God! Indeed, I have suffered a punishment on earth from which the most painful of lingering deaths would have been a blessed and merciful release!"

She had him in her arms again, soothing and comforting him with a mother's and a daughter's tender solicitude and care.

"And now, Lord Advocate," he said resolutely, rising to his feet, "you have heard my wretched confession, and I place myself in your hands, ready to endure any chastisement you may award, to make such restitution as is in my power!"

"Much has been given you," the Lord Advocate answered, with simple solemnity, "and of whom much is given much is required. You may have sinned and come short, as—God forgive us all!—who has not? But you have suffered bitterly, and bitterly have you repented! Maria, Hamish, Pennifeather! Shall we not agree together now that what we have heard this day is from henceforth and for ever buried in oblivion?"

His daughter embraced with streaming eyes the penitent and remorseful man who stood, with such pathetic humility, before her; and the others clasped his hand fervently in token of forgiveness and friendship.

"I am sure," said Sir Hamish Stuart, after they had all so far regained composure, "that I am rightly interpreting my Maria's thoughts when I say that, although her dear wish is that, for her children's sake, her name should be proclaimed stainless, that must not be done by the whole pitiful story of her sister's shame being published to the world."

The Lord Advocate nodded approval.

"That shall be done," he said. "It will simply be minuted that the Crown authorities have now discovered irrefragable proof of the true author of the letters, and of the death of Haviland by misadventure."

"Then, my dear, my dear," Maria smiled upon her father, "there is still a life of tranquil ease and peace awaiting you! All the money that you have never touched is yours, gained without dishonour!"

"I never turned a penny otherwise than by fair means in my life," he answered stoutly, "at least for my own advantage, by whatever means I may have enriched other deserving persons. Poor Mr Proudly!" he went on whimsically, "the litigation over the Langworthy millions is at an end, now that you have appeared! The entire fortune is for you and yours, if you will accept it, with my dear love, as some small recompense for all that you have endured!"

"That she will never do, sir!" replied Sir Hamish—"and again I am sure that I rightly interpret Maria's wish—so long as you live to enjoy it."

"Then I shall have to give it away, after all!" he protested, with an approach to his old exuberance.

"We shall see about that, sir, in the interest of posterity!" Maria replied archly. "Meantime, you shall come to us, to enjoy the society of your grandchildren."

"Grand *children*?" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she said demurely, "there are three--Hamish, Christopher, and Robert."

"Well, it might have been worse," he observed irrepressibly. "Thank Heaven, you forgot the name of your Uncle James! But they must never know who I am," he continued regretfully. "That is part of my just retribution. Christopher Langworthy is dead."

"Then, what will you do?" asked Sir Hamish.

"I know what I should like to do," the other answered hesitatingly.

"And that is?"

"To remain as I am," he answered, with a doubtful, inquiring look at the Lord Advocate.

"What?" exclaimed that gentleman, in undisguised astonishment.

"Just to continue as your clerk, my lord," the other replied, with humble simplicity. "I know the work. I love it. In times of misery and torture it has been my only solace. Now that I am old and at peace, I could find no safer refuge. No one will know, or suspect! Do not turn me away now, after my service for all these years!"

And so it was agreed. The darkened spectacles, indeed, were discarded, and the new Lord of Session's clerk seemed to have regained some of the sprightliness of youth; but no one ever thought of connecting the millionaire, Mr Christopher Langworthy, who had been killed by his scoundrel brother in the train on the night of the Elspeth Junction accident, and whose place had for a time been usurped by that arch-deceiver, with the simple and smiling old gentleman, duly waiting in attendance behind his master's chair on the bench, while the "Motion Roll" was being disposed of in his courtroom of the Outer House of the Court of Session.

He frequently visits at the house of the flourishing King's Counsel, Sir Hamish Stuart, whose winsome and attractive wife—doubly attractive now on account of her strange romantic story—is ceremoniously polite to him in public, and pets and cajoles him by turn in the privacy of her boudoir; and all her children, including a chubby baby girl, adore him.

Now and then Mr Counsellor Horatio Proudly imagines that he perceives, when he looks at him, some vague resemblance to a face which it is an embarrassment to a litigiously trained memory to endeavour to recall. Honoria has her suspicions, though she never puts them in words.

Robert Montgomery pursues his honourable, upright, lonely way; and often in summer-time is he to be found wandering about the woods of his small estate in Inverdeeshire, which marches with the place once purchased by the late Mr Langworthy, now the property of Sir Hamish and Lady Stuart. His old clerk is his constant companion, and one or two sturdy young Stuarts usually romp by their side.

But Mr Charles Pennifeather, the unraveller of plots and spinner of theories, has at last seen through another plot, and evolved from the convolutions of his intricate brain one theory more. He is now by no means certain that there ever existed a drug, an essence, a potion, a vitalising energy, or a material "anaconda." He is inclined to think Mr Langworthy's story but an allegory, and the devil mixture only a metaphorical description of a double dose of original sin, added to the anathematised artistic temperament and a predisposition to enthusiastic eccentricity amounting to something like monomania.

Perhaps Mr Pennifeather is right. Who knows?

Above all, he is more than dubious, in the inmost recesses of his inquisitive and inductive mind, whether the man of the House in Queen Anne Square was not James Langworthy after all.

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